

CHALLENGING GENDER AND GENRE
IN THE LITERARY TEXT:
THE WORKS OF NURIA AMAT

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DECLARATION

I, Nuria Capdevila-Argüelles, hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and is entirely my own work.

Oxford, 12 March 2001

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ABSTRACT

Nuria Amat was born in Barcelona in 1950, the city in which she lives at the present time after extended periods of residence abroad. She obtained a degree in Hispanic Studies and a doctorate in Information Technology, becoming the first female “documentalista” in Spain. Having worked as a lecturer in the Escuela de Biblioteconomía y Documentación, she left the post just before the publication of *La intimidación* (1997). Like other novelists belonging to the so-called Catalan Women’s Renaissance, she started to publish at the end of the 70s, after Franco’s death. This circumstance situates her chronologically within the Spanish “Nueva Narrativa”. Her bibliography comprises not only fiction but also books on research technology and librarianship. This doctoral thesis, the first comprehensive analysis of Amat’s work to date, deals with her five novels, one of them unpublished, and her pseudofictional books which she has described as “libros inclasificables” or “libros sin voz”. The significance given by the author to the narrative genre can be justified through the critical analysis of a crucial component of her prose: metaliterature. The notion of authorship, the Barthesian death of the author, also ascribed to Foucauldian thought, and Amat’s opinion that writing is a suicidal act are notions that permeate her literary production. Amat’s evolution as a novelist reveals crucial aspects of female literary-subjectivity and authorship.

Through the analysis of Amat’s fiction, the imprecise relationship between gender and genre, central to contemporary feminist criticism, will be explored and clarified. Both concepts, the two equivalents of the Spanish word “género”, support politics of representation. I intend to ground my treatment of these concepts in their power of representation within literature. My approach blends feminism, psychoanalysis and narratology so that the generic and gender expectations, challenged and transcended by Amat, can be elucidated. My ultimate aim is to delineate the formulation of Amat’s literary/ narrative poetics as the *bildungsroman* of the authorial voice using a perspective that transcends expectations of gender and genre. In order to reach this conceptual point, this thesis is divided into two parts. The first, entitled “The Genesis of the Text: Intertextuality and Self-Reflexivity”, deals with the “libros sin voz”. The second, entitled “The Genesis of the Gendered Subject: Between the Discourse of the Law and Literary Discourse”, focuses on the novels. Challenging the notion of authority and of the authorial voice –a postmodern dilemma and feminist issue in itself– develops into a thematic narrative issue in Amat’s fiction. Over time, social contexts start losing ground in her writing and, progressively, the literary becomes the sphere of representation against which characters and narrators are constructed. In order to explore the textual implications of Amat’s generic and gender awareness, a feature that isolates her from other Spanish contemporary novelists, I propose a critical engagement with gender theorist Judith Butler. Butler’s own engagement with thinkers such as Foucault and Freud, who will also be referred to in this thesis, and her exhaustive analyses of theories of subjection place her philosophical and sociological thought in line with Amat’s literary approach. My analysis will ultimately reveal what will be considered the author’s monumentalisation of the novelistic genre as the logical result of the *bildung* of her own literary-subjectivity.

INTRODUCTION

Escribir sobre la realidad más inmediata consiste en escribir sobre el deseo de ser escritora. Algo inseguro. [...] No poder escribir sobre el mundo propio porque el mundo entero es el deseo más profundo de ser escritora (*Letra*, 1998: 233-234).

El escritor se alimenta básicamente de sus lecturas. Un escritor es la síntesis de todo lo leído y de lo que nunca podrá leer (*Letra*, 1998: 233).

Nuria Amat, in the first excerpt above, taken from her book of essays and aphorisms *Letra herida* (1998), states that writing about the most immediate reality consists of writing about the desire to be a writer. This is a statement of crucial importance in evaluating this novelist: the main theme of her fiction, the only thing that is always present, that can be traced in some way or other in her fiction and that conditions the development of her prose and also of her characters, is this desire to be/ become a writer. This is a desire marked by insecurity, uncertainty and a desire that has cancelled what is normally understood as the real world in favour of itself, in favour of the process of becoming a literary-subject who writes. In order to contribute to the on-going debate about feminism, theory and the contemporary novel, I aim to explore the notion of literary-subjectivity firstly because I consider that therein lies the originality of Amat's politics of representation; and secondly, because it surrounds the other points I intend to deal with: the concept of

metaliterature, the concept of “locura” and the relationship between gender and genre.

The relationship between what is exposed in her texts and that world which we perceive as reality tends towards absence; the world of imagination is textually much more powerful and its power increases and becomes consolidated in Amat’s most recent publications: *La intimidación* (1997), *Letra herida* (1998) and *El país del alma* (1999). She characterises the writer as a literary self. As such, s/he is nourished by reading. Furthermore, it is reading which frames the subjectivity of the writer who is the synthetic result of “todo lo leído” –arguably not only by the writer but also by the reader who has approached the writer’s text and might be considering the figure of the author through his/her words– and of what s/he will never manage to read: not simply books that have never been written but more specifically things that have remained unreadable, textual silences such as “locura”, homosexual panic, suicide and inner exile. The treatment of these is directly related to the use of metaliterary discourse and to the representational challenge posed by the relationship between gender and genre, crucial to understand Amat’s texts. The analysis of metaliterature, gender and genre will therefore shape decisively my line of argument.

Chronologically, Nuria Amat (Barcelona, 1950) belongs to the so-called Spanish New Narrative and her name could be included in this eclectic ensemble along with Esther Tusquets, Ana María Moix, Cristina Fernández Cubas and so many others. Her first novel appeared in 1979, at a time when women’s writing was flourishing in Spain and novels such as *Crónica del desamor* (Montero 1979), *El*

cuarto de atrás (Martín Gaité 1978) and *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* (Tusquets 1978) were being published. However, the name Nuria Amat hardly ever appears in the numerous classifications that proliferated in the 90s and which attempted to organize into categories the Spanish novelists that started to publish after the end of the dictatorship.¹ In spite of this, reviews of her works of fiction, written by renowned names such as Eduardo Mendoza, Juan Goytisolo, Eduardo Haro Tecglen or Ana María Moix, abound.² Amat is treated as an invisible writer by the same critics that write excellent reviews about her work. Regarding her position in respect to her contemporaries, Amat has stated:

[...] se me ve como una escritora muy poco española. Estos problemas de identidad que sufro (y sufrimos tantos escritores) me llevan a creer que mi patria es la literatura. Pero me gusta muchísimo tener grandes lectores en América Latina. Por otro lado, he leído tanta literatura europea contemporánea que algo se me debe haber contagiado. Cuando escribo necesito trabajar con las palabras, arañarlas, removerlas, hacerlas mías. Esta es una necesidad que no debo compartir con la mayoría de escritores españoles, más austeros, más duros de oído. En mi opinión la única

¹ Amat's absence is all the more surprising given the diversity of criteria used to classify chronologically or thematically (e.g. Davies 1998, Martínez Cachero 1997). She is briefly cited in the bibliographical compilation carried out by Levine, Marson & Waldman (1993).

² This excerpt from one of Haro Tecglen's reviews exemplifies the tone with which critics have written on Amat. In his "Escáner" he writes

Tengo una inclinación, un cariño literario por Nuria Amat. No la conozco, ni veo que nadie se ocupe mucho de su rica prosa. Creo que no entra en los moldes. Me gusta, por ejemplo, la facilidad con que inventa en castellano, al traducir, palabras excelentes: "bricolagismo" o "narratividad". [...] Qué angustia, la de los géneros. [...]

Ah, no sé cuál será el destino de Nuria Amat (*El País*, 9/9/1995).

In *Escribir y publicar*, an anonymous contributor writes a "Carta abierta a Nuria Amat":

Encuentro en sus libros lo que Borges estimaba en Wilde: el encanto. Esto, por supuesto, no excluye otras cosas. Las complementa. Su literatura es enérgicamente suicida. Me gusta que así sea. Pero también desearía que no lo fuera. Quisiera que el mundo supiera de usted. [...] Su bienamado Cioran añoraba la asignatura del suicidio como vía para no cometerlo. Yo añoro otra asignatura para combatir las injusticias literarias. El escritor no es aquel que se sienta y escribe. Esa es una confusión que los propios escritores tienden a propagar. En un parvulario niños de seis años escriben un cuento sobre el sapo. En una buhardilla Kafka escribe un cuento sobre el escarabajo (February-March/1999).

manera de ser universal es siendo tú misma. Escribiendo sobre lo que tengo más adentro se llega más lejos (from personal correspondence with the author, 14/5/1999).

Amat's marginal position has been cultivated further by her tendency to choose small publishing houses for her books.³ In 1997, Nuria Amat departed from this practice and gave her novel *La intimidación* to Alfaguara after having stayed with Anaya & Mario Muchnik for fifteen years.⁴ The themes and symbols Amat recurrently uses are: the relationship between the library (seen as holder of the literary canon), woman and madness, subjectivity and subjectivisation, the relationship between suicide and identity, and metaliterature. All these establish a key point of critical contact between Amat and post-feminist authors like Judith Butler or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who were unknown in print in Spain at the time Amat's work first started to appear. The influence of philosophers such as Foucault or writers such as Proust can be traced in Amat in the same way that it can be traced in the theorists just mentioned and other post-feminists. In a move whose expansion is similar to the growing importance he has come to have for feminists, the influence of Foucault's writing will actually gain importance as Part II unfolds the discussion of Amat's novels. In this way, my reading will expose the influence of genderisation processes in the configuration of Amat's characters: reading for gender in Foucault

³ Zatlin's article "Women Novelists in Democratic Spain: Freedom to Express the Female Perspective" points out that half of the novels considered in her article "were published by smaller presses or presses with a particular commitment to feminist writing" (1987: 29-30). *Pan de boda* (Amat 1979) and *Narciso y Armonía* (Amat 1982) are among the novels she cites.

⁴ Ruben Wisotzki looks back on Amat's beginnings: "Descubierta como escritora por el editor argentino Mario Muchnik, fue tentada por el poeta español Carlos Barral para que publicase su primer libro cuando tenía 25 años [...]" (*El Universal*, 29/11/1998).

is, in my opinion, a similar operation to reading for gender in Amat. Both authors are interested in ambiguity.⁵ In the writings of both, the critic can extract views on genderisation by teasing them out from their narratives. This is an activity effected by gender critics who have used the absence of gender analysis as a blindspot of the theories of modernity. The originality of Amat on the stage of the so-called Spanish New Narrative has to be understood taking into consideration the following points: on the one hand, current trends in the field of feminist studies and, on the other hand, what her works have emphasized. In other words, how can it be maintained that the narrative rendering of female narrators and characters with personalities defined and fates conditioned by their reading, their writing or by the exercise of the two activities borders on the inexhaustible or, at least, has served to underline the works of an author for twenty years? The answer to this question rests upon a psychoanalytical axiom that has been subverted and reappropriated for feminist purposes and that deals with the nature of desire. If it is assumed that desire has to be a never ending, never totally fulfilled, chain of representation, the issue of whether the desire of the real or fictitious female writer can ever be totally satisfied, a theme repeatedly treated by Amat, turns out to be, by definition, a topic loaded with vast narrative possibilities which I will seek to elucidate.

From the perspective just outlined, it can be ascertained that, as a whole, the texts discussed in this thesis offer a feminist literary configuration more consistently

⁵ Regarding ambiguity, Amat has alleged:

[...] Nada es blanco o negro. El mundo de las emociones se mueve en la ambigüedad. Y ese es el mundo que a mi me interesa narrar (from personal correspondence with the author, 14/5/1999).

intellectualised than the one conveyed by other Spanish female novelists who declare themselves reluctant to adopt feminism as a personal and political movement. The resistance to define themselves as feminists has been pointed out by, among others, Davies (1991 and 1998), Ballesteros (1994) and Montero (1995) who also coincide in affirming not only the rejection, but also the tendency to be ignorant of the theoretical variety of feminist critical schools. The innovative feminist *raison d'être* of Catalan writers has been acknowledged by critics such as Manteiga (1988) or McKerney (1988). The latter, in her essay "A Feminist Renaissance in Catalonia", considers Catalan female novelists to exhibit

a markedly feminist point of view in their treatment of several themes which are prevalent in their work –female adolescence and sexuality, the isolation and solitude of women, their psychological development, and the role and social position of older women. The development of these motifs is often sharpened and enhanced by a strong and constant undercurrent of Catalanism. Several members of this group of writers now in their thirties and forties, whose work began to appear in the 1970s and has flourished since the death of Franco, have gained a good deal of recognition (McKerney, in Manteiga, et al. 1988: 124).⁶

Manteiga (1988), on the other hand, comments on the abundance of female writers:

one of the outstanding features of the literature produced in Spain since the death of Franco has been the growing prominence of female writers. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Catalonia which has experienced a cultural renaissance, and with it the appearance on the literary scene of an entourage of very successful women writers like Montserrat Roig, Carme Riera and Esther Tusquets, all effective spokeswomen for the women's cause (1988: 2).

⁶ She is referring to Riera and Roig. The latter was born in 1946 and died in 1991. Riera is just two years older than Amat (1950). Amat has also dealt with female adolescence and sexuality, her female characters tend to solitude and their psychological development turns out to be a critical challenge of interpretation.

Not writing in Catalan and not always, or at least not in her initial works, including Catalan identity in her feminist agenda could be the reason for her exclusion from the group.⁷ The essay “Feminismo y literatura: la narrativa de los años 70”, collectively written by Romero, Alberdi, Martínez and Zauner (in Durán 1987: 337-357) also gives special consideration to Catalan writers. These critics adopt the practice of enumeration in order to ascertain the common features of Catalan writers.⁸ In spite of the simplistic sort of evaluation this method implies when used without subsequent discussion, the authors ascertain that the influence of the advent of feminist theories has turned these Catalan writers into novelists narrating anew. Other characteristics pointed out for them are:

- Todas ellas nacieron alrededor de los años 40.
- Proviene de la misma clase social.
- Ejercen actividades profesionales más o menos ligadas al mundo cultural: enseñanza, crítica, edición, periodismo.
- Plantean, en la mayoría de los casos, la búsqueda de su identidad como mujeres a través de la literatura.
- Hay en sus obras influencias de la cultura europea (1987: 343).

This collective essay does not give any information as to how literature is used by the authors as a field of representation in which to (re)invent identity. One would expect the piece to explain at least some of the cultural influences or to clarify in what ways

⁷ Amat is a Catalan writer who writes in Castilian and who has actively defended the existence of a bilingual status in Catalan society and culture. For a thorough critical exploration and political explanation of her linguistic choice, see the essay “¿Qué lengua pertenece a quién?” (*Letra*, 1998: 129-138).

⁸ Their approach is justified as follows: “Nuestro análisis se ha centrado en las obras de autoras catalanas o en aquella cuya actividad se sitúa sobre todo en el ámbito de la cultura catalana, porque consideramos que ellas son las que inician lo que más tarde se daría en llamar el boom de la literatura femenina” (1987: 342).

social class may influence characterisation and also in what ways cultural activities such as critical writing or editing condition creative writing.⁹ Amat was born in 1950. Her social background is similar to that of the writers included in this group. She too worked in an environment related to the cultural sphere: she lectured in the Escuela de Biblioteconomía y Documentación of the University of Barcelona, an occupation she gave up just before the publication of *La intimidación* (1997).¹⁰ Her works are also influenced by European culture. However, it would not be accurate to claim that she uses literature as the tool in her own personal “búsqueda de su identidad” as a woman. What can definitely be claimed and should always be borne in mind when reading her fiction is that in fact it is her female narrators and female protagonists who actually construct their subjectivity in relation to literature, the sphere of representation that always influences them.

An exploration of the notion of the autobiographical impulse in female-authored texts, in which narrators seem to share features with authors, could, and maybe should, become more involved with the theme of literary influence which I shall have present in my discussion of Amat’s fiction. Writers and critics coincide in isolating the existence of this defining feature. However, it should not be treated in a simplistic way. In a wider context, this entails an exploration of the notion of the

⁹ This appears to be the only essay or article that deals extensively with women writers in Cataluña. Less extensive analyses of these writers exist. Examples are Susanna 1988 and Shyfter 1980. The description of the Catalan Women’s Renaissance in Durán (1987) continues with the new values their novels disclose. It is a very simplistic enumeration (1987: 343) that falls into the essentialist trap that horrifies Amat (see Jorge de Cominges September/ 1999).

¹⁰ Her essays “Biblioteca interior” (*Letra*, 1998: 169-176) and “Escritores que lloran, bibliotecarios que aúllan como lobos” (*Letra*, 1998: 177-195) discuss the symbolic importance of the space of the library and of the profession of librarian in her writing.

subject as a historical product. Such an exploration of the subject has been undertaken by postmodern critics such as Linda Hutcheon, gender critics such as Judith Butler, and psychoanalytical writers such as Elizabeth Wright. Their exploration is metatextual, based on what has been written and has become influential, i.e. critically canonical, previously. Identity quests in Amat's books execute a similar move insofar as her narrative voices look for self-definition in literature. The product of these quests, Amat's prose, is therefore metaliterary, based on what has been written before too.

This thesis is divided into two parts. Part I will discuss *Letra herida* (1998) and also the texts published between 1982 and 1997, books that exhibit a type of discourse which can be considered to be halfway between essay and fiction. Between 1979 and 1999 Nuria Amat published four novels: *Pan de boda* (1979), *Narciso y Armonía* (1982), *La intimidación* (1997) and *El país del alma* (1999). To this list, *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, an unpublished novel, can be added. The novels are the texts on which Part II will focus. With the exception of *Letra herida*, published in 1998, all the texts discussed in Part I were published between *Narciso y Armonía* and *La intimidación*, i.e., they are chronologically framed by narrative. These two novels therefore form a narrative cycle characterised by the literary exploration of textual genesis understood by the authorial self as the real engine keeping literature going. The separation of the “libros sin voz” (Part I) from the novels (Part II) disrupts the chronological order of the books discussed in this dissertation in favour of the

generic privilege assigned to the novel in *Letra herida*.¹¹ In this way, the “libros sin voz” are separated from the, as it were, “libros con voz”. The following bibliographical classification synthesises diachronically the evolution of Amat’s fiction:

1. First novels: *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* (unpublished), *Pan de boda* (1979), *Narciso y Armonía* (1982).
2. The “libros clasificables” or “libros sin voz”: *El ladrón de libros y otras bibliomanías* (1988), *Amor breve* (1990), *Monstruos* (1990), *Todos somos Kafka* (1993), *Viajar es muy difícil. Manual de ruta para lectores periféricos* (1995).
3. Literary maturity or the “libros con voz”: *La intimidad* (1997), *Letra herida* (1998), *El país del alma* (1999).¹²

The novel *La intimidad* marks a significant juncture in Amat’s narrative evolution. Published in Alfaguara in 1997, it introduced Amat to a wider audience. Nevertheless, her first two published texts were novels and this is a genre she

¹¹ In interview (Barcelona, 18/6/1999), Amat described the books analysed in Part I as “libros sin voz” or “clasificables”.

¹² Her most relevant publications in the field of library science and documentation are:

(1978): *Técnicas documentales y fuentes de información*. Barcelona: Bibliograf.

(1982): *La biblioteca: tratado general sobre su organización, técnicas y utilización*. Barcelona: Diáfora.

(1990): *De la información al saber*. Madrid: Fundesco.

(1991): *La biblioteca fantasma: el laboratorio de lo imaginario*. México: Montena, Consejo Superior para la Cultura y las Artes.

(1994): *El libro mudo: las aventuras del escritor entre la pluma y el ordenador*. Madrid: Anaya & Mario Muchnik.

(1995): *La documentación y sus tecnologías*. Madrid: Pirámide.

These texts, not being part of Amat’s fiction, will not be discussed in detail although some reference will be made to *El libro mudo. Las aventuras del escritor entre la pluma y el ordenador*. Amat regards them simply as part of her professional life as a university lecturer and documentalist. They were written with a clear audience in mind. The relevance the field may have on her fiction is sufficiently explained in *El ladrón de libros*. In interview (Barcelona, 18/6/1999), Amat expressed the view that they should not be considered part of her bibliography as a writer of fiction, a concern that seems to be totally justifiable.

abandons until the year in which *La intimidación* is published. *La intimidación* appears as Amat's first "libro con voz" in 15 years, a novel that paradoxically deals with the death of the authorial voice and the voices of the dead authors.

Part I is entitled "The Genesis of the Text: Intertextuality and Self-Reflexivity". Priority will be given to *Todos somos Kafka* (1993), *Viajar es muy difícil. Manual de ruta para lectores periféricos* (1995) and *Letra herida* (1998). The first chapter of Part I will discuss the role of the female narrator of *Todos somos Kafka*. In order to do that, it is necessary to understand and isolate some features of the sphere of representation against which her I-ness is going to be developed and phrased: metaliterature. The genesis of a female authorial voice, her very particular relationship with an influential male authority and also her observation and dialogic interaction with female voices in the history of literature are the main threads of the novel. These become crucial in Amat's recent novels to the extent that the anonymous narrator of *Todos somos Kafka* lurks behind the lives of Nena Rocamora (female protagonist and one of the narrative voices of *El país del alma*) and of the female narrator of *La intimidación*. Once metaliterature has been debated, it will be possible to focus on the construction of the narrator's subjectivity in order to discuss finally the end of the novel as a metaliterary anagnorisis so that the two definitional stands of this complex text –"libro sin voz" and metanovel– are brought together.

The second chapter of Part I returns to metaliterature and explores it further. It offers a reading of *Viajar es muy difícil. Manual de ruta para lectores periféricos* in which the function of the prescriptive tone of the text is discussed in order to

ascertain the representational consequences caused by the detachment of the authorial voice from a narrative I-ness that was present and representatively active in *Todos somos Kafka*. In respect of the general exploration of Amat's textual genesis undertaken in Part I, the analysis of *Viajar es muy difícil* casts light precisely on a particular way of observing and making sense of literature. If in *Todos somos Kafka* the literary-subject was introduced, in *Viajar es muy difícil* what is going to be disclosed is what frames the literary-subject. In this way, there is a psychoanalytical dimension to be discussed and, from there, it is necessary to move to the treatment received by "locura", a crucial signifier in Amat's representational politics and narrative poetics. The relationship between genderisation processes and the generic form of literature gains relevance as Amat's rendering of the relationship between madness and writing is unfolded. *Viajar es muy difícil* reformulates the history of literature in order to reach the literary-subject again, in the form of the peripheral reader: a subject that is always in flight, always in a momentary state of being, always becoming.

Both *Todos somos Kafka* and *Viajar es muy difícil* can be read as books on their way to clarity. After having published a novel, *La intimidación* (1997), that crucially determined not only her narrative poetics but also her politics of representation, Amat published another book of essays: *Letra herida* (1998), on which the third chapter of Part I will focus. I shall argue that her most elaborate book of essays renders a critically important archaeology of Amat's authorial self in a tone that could only be achieved after having written a novel, *La intimidación*, that combines

the themes of *Todos somos Kafka* and *Viajar es muy difícil* and that presents a narrator dealing with “locura” in a tone as calm as that of the essays and aphorisms of *Letra herida*. The symbolic implications of the title *Letra herida*, analysed in the first section of Chapter 3, deserve a separate discussion as they are part and parcel of the “deseo más profundo de ser escritora” referred to in the opening excerpt. The important role played by metaliterature in contemporary literary creation is elucidated and literary-subjectivity clarified further. Apart from this discussion, a consideration of the role of aphorisms in this text will be required because they sustain and also refine the critical dimension of the discourse of *Letra herida*. This will be done in the second section of Chapter 3. Besides, by extension, as open-expressions of literary I-ness, these aphorisms have to be read parenthetically as fixations of the author’s literary-subjectivity. Their analysis leads to the final section of the chapter where it will be possible to momentarily fix, somewhere between gender and genre, the female literary-subject that will lead us into Amat’s fiction. The analysis of *Letra herida* will reveal the importance of the novelistic genre in Amat’s literary production.

Part II, entitled “The Genesis of the Gendered Subject: Between the Discourse of the Law and Literary Discourse”, will concentrate on Amat’s novels in such a way that a contrast is established between those that were published before the “libros sin voz” and the ones that were published after. Chapter 1 will therefore deal with *Pan de boda* and *Narciso y Armonía*. Chapter 2 will focus on *La intimidación* and *El país del alma*. Finally, the last chapter of Part II is devoted to Amat’s unpublished

novel *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, written before *Pan de boda* but with fundamental points of contact with her most recent publications. The metaliterary voice phrases itself differently in every novel. In *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, it is a young and unexperienced literary voice. A shy voice in *Pan de boda* and *Narciso y Armonía*, it spoke only to the author and the author listened to it. In *La intimidad* and *El país del alma*, it also speaks to us. Of all the novels that will be discussed in Part II, *Pan de boda* is the only one that exhibits the relationship between sex and identity under an explicitly intellectualised rationale. *Pan de boda* and *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* are narrated by female voices that destabilise and challenge the preconceived signification of sex, gender and body in order to explore self and identity. *Narciso y Armonía* is narrated by an omniscient voice that shares the approach of Esther, first-person narrator of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, and Maite, first-person narrator of *Pan de boda*. It can be claimed that *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, unpublished, belongs to an intraliterary domain, and *Pan de boda*, a text that existed as a book but that was ignored, to the margins of the literary scene. A more central position is reached with *Narciso y Armonía*. Published in 1982, it is the first text of Amat to which critics make reference. The novel also closes a narrative cycle. Amat will not publish another novel until 1997 and when *La intimidad* is published, both gender and genre become destabilised within a text that, as opposed to *Todos somos Kafka*, has to be undoubtedly called a novel.

A mimetic relationship can be established between Amat's texts and psychoanalysis. The destabilisation of narrative genres structures the texts written by

Amat from 1988 to 1995, whereas the destabilisation of gender expectations occurs more in the texts published before 1988 and also in the more recent ones, those that have appeared after 1995. These texts are more receptive to a thorough gender reading, as undertaken in the previous chapter. It can then be concluded that Amat's writings challenge both gender assumptions and genre preconceptions. *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* presents a female voice whose self-representation is deeply conditioned by the absence of the mother. Such absence also determines the representation of the female protagonists of *Narciso y Armonía* (1982), *La intimidación* (1997) and many of Amat's short stories. Furthermore, the existence of the discourse about/ on the mother produced by others, along with the non-existence of the mother's own discourse sustain the problematic genderisation of the female speaking subjects in Amat's text. This common thematic thread makes the psychoanalytic plot of Amat's text a rich one, and one that is solved by the narrative of the most literary of deaths, the death of Nena Rocamora in *El país del alma*.

In Western literature, the 80s witnessed the emergence of a confessional discourse mixed with theoretical observation that has influenced not only the configuration of the 'I', but also the configuration of the authorial voice and the genesis of the text.¹³ The result is that the ontological limits of a first-person text have undergone a process of expansion and the solipsistic nature of this writing has been challenged. This is particularly clear in female-authored novels published in the

¹³ For further information, see, among others, Ciplijauskaitė (1988), Frye (1986) and Duplessis (1985).

90s in Spain.¹⁴ However, in the case of Amat's novels, the "game" between first- and third-person has resulted in a metaliterary line that has become consolidated in recent publications. This dissertation seeks to explore the "game" itself and its recent consolidation.

An increasing number of Spanish female-authored novels have adopted the autobiographical genre in order to illustrate the construction of female discourse. Writing, as critics such as Ballesteros (1994) or Ciplijauskaitė (1988) allege and as novels such as *La hescritora* (Canals 1998) show, has become a meditation upon the theme of identity sometimes resulting in the indetermination between life and literature. *Letra herida* (Amat 1998) can be read as a meditation upon the theme of the identity of the writer Nuria Amat. Of all her books, this is the one that could most accurately serve my purpose of introducing the writer and her works, the aim of this introduction. After her works have been discussed in the chapters to follow, a return to the theme of the literary identity of the writer Nuria Amat will ensue in the conclusion.

From this perspective, this indeterminacy between life and literature will be turned upside down throughout Amat's works. Critics seem to regard this indeterminacy as something that exists in the text and that actually explains its existence. For Amat, this textual lack of definition between life and literature is a precondition for the advent of the literary-subject. Without it, the literary-subject

¹⁴ For further information, see Ballesteros (1994), Davies (1998) Montero (1995) Martínez Cachero (1997) and Ruiz Guerrero (1997).

cannot become, i.e. momentarily be in one of the many forms it can adopt: writer, reader, narrator, and character. Amat remarks regarding female-authored texts:

A mi modo de ver, esta obviada biográfica de aire sentimental, o falta de destreza para el fingimiento, es el mayor defecto que ha sufrido una parte de la literatura escrita por mujeres. [...] La técnica de la simulación, el baile constante de disfraces consigo mismo, ese dar a entender lo que no es cierto, es la disposición básica que debe mantener el escritor en su trabajo de escritura. Lo cual no implica mentir cuando se escribe. Todo lo contrario. A buen seguro que mentía Colet cuando presumía decir toda la verdad en sus libros y poemas, y decía la verdad Virginia Woolf cuando simulaba ser Mrs. Dalloway o la señorita La Trobe. Ése es el único camino para que una historia, una novela, un estilo sea verdadero. De ahí que la frase de la poetisa Tsvetaieva («nosotros, los poetas, somos todos judíos») sea tan sugerente, tan cierta, un verdadero hallazgo literario. Lo que a primera vista parece una falsedad o bien un disparate es la explicación más auténtica, original, profunda y repleta de matices que he leído sobre el significado de ser poeta, de ser autora y de ejercer el oficio literario en nuestros tiempos (*Letra*, 1998: 72-73).

This “obviada biográfica” can be interpreted as an implicit criticism of what certain scholars expect to find in female-authored novels, narrators who resemble the author and who can be explained by appealing to the life of the author instead of to the usage of literature the author makes in order to construct them. From this perspective, the voices created by Amat are literary reflections and are sustained by metaliterature, a concept that will be described in the first chapter of this thesis. The number of critics that have mentioned and repeatedly discussed the autobiographical dimension of many female-authored novels published in the eighties and nineties is immense. They have also signalled the novelistic genre as the recipient of this indeterminacy between the life of the writer and the text. And they have normally stopped there, leaving literature itself outside and have therefore read novels simply as “crónica[s] de la autora disfrazada de narradora” (*Todos*, 1993: 19). For Amat, this

rationale is simplistic if the representational power of literature is left out of it. How does she want to be read then? In *Letra herida*, she seems to have reached awareness as to how to relate life and literature and how to understand the input of both things in the emergence of fiction and of the literary-subject: “El escritor ya no escribe su vida, escribe a través de su vida literariamente transfigurada” (*Letra*, 1998: 235).¹⁵ It is the author’s own world, her own biography that has become the desire of being “escritora”. To be and to become are going to be fundamental words in this dissertation: acts of being and acts of becoming literary-subjects are crucial themes in Amat’s works. She might consider she lacks a biography (*Letra*, 1998: 66) but that does not mean that she is absent from the discourse of her books or that an account of her literary self cannot be traced. All the more so given her affirmation regarding authorship: “En tanto que autora me convierto en un sujeto sospechoso” (*Letra*, 1998: 69). Literary-subjectivity and what will be defined as metaliterary discourse unify the diverse texts of Amat’s bibliography. The form of literary-subjectivity privileged throughout Amat’s work is one that blends and relates the roles of “escritora” and “lectora”. In Amat’s books, the world of literature is going to be contemplated by the eyes of a female writer and this look has to be sustained by the relationship between gender and genre present in Amat’s works. From the point of view of genre, Amat’s voice privileges the novel. The novel is her starting point, her

¹⁵ She has expressed this opinion elsewhere:

La vida es literatura, suele decirse. Yo digo: la literatura es la vida. Mi obra trata de conseguir la simbiosis perfecta de una y otra existencia (from an interview by Isolina Ballesteros, Fall 1998/ Winter 1998/1999: 680).

destiny as writer and also her favourite genre. This personal preference can be contextualised within what Judith Butler, among others, considers to be critically important in recent literary and cultural studies. She acknowledges the current analytical return to an exploration of the personal:

Within literary and cultural studies recently, we have witnessed not merely a turn to the personal voice, but a nearly compulsory production of exorbitant affect as the sign of proof that the forces of censorship are being actively and insistently countered (1997: 144).

There is an implicit reference to feminism in this quote insofar as the political and the personal are being equated. This equation cannot be dissociated from the relationship between the psychic and the social, a crucial area present in Butler's approach to gender identity, subjectivity and subjection and, of course, to the theme of agency. Among Hispanists, Catherine Davies (in Forsas-Scott 1991), in relation to novels written by women in the 80s, states the importance of this equation too: "Above all, the problem is to elicit the boundaries between the personal and the political through art from a female perspective" (1991: 216). Ciplijauskaitė (1988), Zatlin (1987) and Dahlerup (1986), among others, also support this underlying principle.

The influence of Foucault and the development of gender awareness is evident in both Amat and Butler. Both authors transcend his views and both are explicit about his influence. The usage and interpretation of theoretical approaches adopted by both authors can be considered a more daring move in the case of Amat

than in the case of Butler, not because the former has produced metaliterary fiction and metaliterary theory, but because she defies the borders between gender and genre. In fact, the metatextual or metaliterary dimension that can be said to exist in Butler's analytical approach stops because she assimilates theory without testing her assumptions consistently enough in the domain of literature. Although what could be termed her analysis of the politics of reality, in the sense of analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge at the level of the social, is very thorough, literary analysis is only marginal but, nevertheless, her approach can be very productive when applied to literary texts. Still, Butler seems to be able to envisage the creation of "a certain intertextual writing that might well generate wholly different epistemic maps" (Butler, in Nicholson 1997: 301).¹⁶ In the previously cited interview carried out by Isolina Ballesteros, Amat affirms that

La voz de la escritura no tiene sexo, sólo identidades. ¿Qué significa escribir como hombre o bien como mujer? Durante años traté en vano de dar respuesta a estas preguntas. En este sentido, ¿cuál es la diferencia entre Proust y Virginia Woolf? Ninguna. Los hermanas esa voz especialísima de escritura que tienen cada uno y que al mismo tiempo los hace distinguibles, personalísimos, únicos. Los escritores somos seres anormales, en cuanto a que estamos fuera de la norma. Cuanto más profundizamos en nosotros mismos, más nos abrimos al exterior. La literatura escrita por mujeres ha abundado en este secreto. Pero de esta literatura me interesa la escrita por aquellas autoras que llevan consigo aquellas cualidades que la leyenda perversa atribuye solamente a los varones: independencia, inteligencia, fuerza, sabiduría, valor. Literatura es ruptura, y éste es el camino que tratamos de seguir cuando escribimos unas y otros (686).

¹⁶ Literary analysis can also be found in Butler's writing, e.g. *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) and *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative* (1997), but in a more marginal way and certainly not exploiting all the possibilities of her own formulations arguably because of her interest in reality/ the real through rhetoric and also through the reinterpretation of former philosophical formulations. Butler is sensitive to the symbolic dimension of social practice and Amat develops the social and historical dimension of the symbolic practice of literature by making pseudofiction out of it or by making pseudotheory.

Nuria Amat's writings tend to engage with literature in a very active way. In other words, her works particularise a relationship with the literary canon that merits further exploration since it comprises not only philosophers, novelists and critics, but also literary topics, characters, works and quotations. All these ingredients are concocted into a metaliterary blend, or rather, into what might be called the literarization of literature –metaliterature– together with an exploration of self-reflexivity: subjection. The desire for self-reflexivity cannot be dissociated from theories of subject production and from autobiographical literary moulds. The way Amat explores the personal justifies her detachment from a national tradition and her attachment to literature in a more general way. I will support the claim that this attachment to literature, root of Amat's metaliterary discourse, results in the establishment of a textual relationship between gender and genre. This has to be related to the symbolic importance the space of the library has in her fiction, along with the profession of librarian, a field of expertise that is part of her own biography. Furthermore, the role of literature itself in the memory of Amat is of crucial importance, as she acknowledges in the prologue to *El ladrón de libros*, a “libro sobre el libro” (1988: 13) described by herself both as “libro personal” and as the most autobiographical of all the books published by her until 1988:

Por eso me complace decir (y sin que se tome como un guiño arbitrario) que entre mis libros publicados, es éste el más autobiográfico (1988: 14).

La intimidad (1997) was published nearly ten years after *El ladrón de libros*. In between these two texts, there are several books that in various ways deal with the autobiographical impulse of the authorial voice always mixing it with literary material. As Rodríguez Fischer points out, Amat's books of fiction "escapan a los diseños habituales o convencionales en el actual panorama narrativo autóctono" (1998: 128). When a female author produces texts that escape conventional narrative moulds, the relationship between gender and genre is summoned to the scene with all its critical impact. Surprisingly, this relationship has not been critically scrutinised by Judith Butler in spite of the extensive breadth of her exploration of theories of subject construction both in diachronic and synchronic dimensions. It can be concluded that this is a gap that literary analysis can fill with signification and that my own literary analysis of Amat's fiction will scrutinise.

Brownlow & Kronik indicate in the title of their study on modern Spanish narrative that intertextuality is a pursuit and also, in literature and culture, "a defining component of textuality itself" (1998: 12).¹⁷ Metaliterature, as analysed in Part I and as a crucial ingredient of the novels discussed in Part II, seems to be representationally wider, since literature, the term the prefix meta- is resignifying, contains the text itself. Metaliterature would then be linked to the production of a discourse that exposes literary sources and influences and whose form –self-reflexive

¹⁷ Roland Barthes instigated the idea of viewing Literature with a capital 'L', as a concept in permanent tension with the concept of textuality. The written word could then be scrutinized from two different angles that correspond to two different ways of theorising literature: according to the classic notion of a *work* (*oeuvre*) and the modern notion of a *text*. The former appears as a "closed, finished, reliable, representational object", the latter can be considered "an open, infinite process that is both meaning-generating and meaning-subverting" (Johnson, in Lentricchia & McLaughlin 1995 [1990]: 40).

and intertextual— fluctuates between the language of theory and the strategies of fiction. This textual tissue thematically amalgamates the books that will be considered in the next three chapters. In them, intertextuality is pursued. How a literary text is generated and what components sustain the genesis of the text and condition the (de)stabilisation of the elements that surround it: (female) writer, authorial self, reader, is an obsessive theme in these books. Why? How does this influence narrative poetics and what does it say critically about the author and her time?

On the other hand, it is not only the presence of the psychiatric hospital in many of Amat's texts that will allow the establishment of a mimetic relationship between her prose and psychoanalysis. Following Foucault, gender theorists like Butler (1990) or de Lauretis (1987) have approached psychoanalysis genealogically, as the descendant of the scientific discourse of medicine and psychiatry. Also very Foucauldian in its approach to literature and in the treatment of themes of subject construction, the analyses of the female psyche most of Amat's texts incorporate surprisingly display points of contact particularly with the work of Butler who has extensively dealt with theories of subject formation. If psychoanalysis started because of the willingness of female patients to be analysed, Amat's writing is rooted in the willingness of female subjects to narrate their subjectivity as a *tropos*, a linguistic occasion of becoming. What is a crucial theme in Amat's works of fiction is also present in her pseudofictional works.

The obsession with intertextuality, along with the self-reflexive nature of these books, critically situates Amat's politics of representation at the level of contemporary feminism. The self-reflexive approach to the formulation of a politics results in a rationale that summons a certain implicit theory of textuality to the scene; indeed, as Butler alleges, "a certain intertextual writing that might well generate wholly different epistemic maps" (in Nicholson 1997: 301). Within these maps, there are several locations –e.g. gender, desire, the subject, the body, sex and sexuality– and routes –e.g. psychoanalysis, philosophy, queer theory and rhetoric– which make up the discursive geography of this new episteme. Self-reflexivity is discursive; self-consciousness is psychoanalytical. The relationship between intertextuality and self-reflexivity is critically positioned within the domain of psychoanalytical theoretical formulations, a fact that will subsequently condition the influence of gender in the configuration of Amat's narrative characters. The splitting of consciousness is one of the cornerstones of psychoanalysis and a crucial Freudian area of study. As Grosz affirms, "Freud's middle period culminates around 1915, when he published the 'Papers on metapsychology', in which he presented a theoretical discussion and analysis of the concepts upon which he had to rely in his case studies" (in Wright 1996 [1992]: 128). In the same way, throughout these metaliterary texts –rather than texts with a metaliterary dimension, which would be the case of the novels– Amat exposes also an interpretative strategy. Starting from the premise that literature is not an independent universe, she maps and interconnects themes and characters, producing a fiction that reflects upon the role of fiction in the history of literature.

Throughout Part I, it will become apparent that intertextuality is used for the sake of self-reflexivity and vice versa and that metaliterature is directly related to these two ideas.

For the critic, gender cannot be secondary to the writer's historical moment. The central argument of gender criticism has been awareness of gender citationality. Nuria Amat can be considered to be the only Spanish female novelist with enough publications to turn gender awareness into a citational ingredient of her prose.¹⁸ Not only does she exhibit a very consistent gender awareness but she also theorises it influenced by the same writers that have conditioned the advent of gender criticism itself and of the current generation of productive gender critics such as Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler, Nancy Miller or Paul Julian Smith among Hispanists.

Amat writes as metawriter in the same way Butler theorises as a metatheorist that subverts and reinterprets previous philosophical positions. For Amat, the subjectivity of the writer is a crucial issue both when writing fiction and when writing pseudotheoretical or pseudofictional works. Both writers test the force of interpellation within philosophy, psychoanalysis and culture, the difference between them being that Amat fictionalises the 'I' thus creating metaliterary discourse whereas Butler rhetoricises it in an attempt to explain it. The female subject internalises and speaks the language of gender in order to be socially intelligible. The literary-subject internalises and speaks the language of genre in order to be literarily

¹⁸ Almudena Grandes dealt with gender identity in her *Malena es un nombre de tango* (1994) and also in *Te llamaré Viernes* (1991). So did Rosa Montero in *Te trataré como una reina* (1983) and *Amado amo* (1988).

intelligible. Throughout this thesis, I will be challenging intelligibility in order to navigate between the representational domain of gender and the representational domain of genre in order to expose the textual sites where, intentionally or unintentionally, Amat has opened a space for the two concepts to develop their influence together, as is the case with *El país del alma*. Part II will be tracing this progression and aiming to establish a comparison between the ontological movement executed by Amat's fiction with respect to the same theorists that have influenced the writing of gender theorists such as Butler and Kosofsky Sedgwick. This line of interpretation will make it possible for us to understand the nature and development of her literary "voz" which she regards as her greatest achievement.

PART I

THE GENESIS OF THE TEXT:

INTERTEXTUALITY AND SELF-REFLEXIVITY

CHAPTER 1

Todos somos Kafka (1993):

METALITERATURE AS A DEVICE TO EXPRESS FEMALE LITERARY-SUBJECTIVITY AND AUTHORSHIP

1. METALITERATURE: A (POSTMODERN) CONCEPT?

De la importancia de la biblioteca en mi vida de escritora he hablado hasta la saciedad en casi todos mis escritos. Del psiquiátrico he hablado menos. Es un tema no tan confortable como el sugerido por el mundo de los libros y también menos sofisticado. Escribir sobre libros y fantasear a propósito de sus autores y héroes literarios atenúa parte del sufrimiento creativo. Pero la metaliteratura, ese hermoso afán de sentirse prisionero del reino literario, también es limitada. Conduce al agotamiento. La locura, sin embargo, es infinita y variada. La locura no se inventa (*Letra*, 1998: 170-171).

He llegado aquí por mis propios medios, aunque no por voluntad propia. Las lectoras no suelen terminar sus días como las protagonistas de sus cuentos y con menos razón cuando ni siquiera tuvieron tiempo de escribirlos. Recuerdo, eso sí, el esfuerzo que me supuso escapar de la sala de máquinas del sanatorio. [...]

Así que estoy en la cama, sin más, pensando en la muerte de los escritores suicidas y no suicidas y sometida a la tarea de repetir; callar y repetir (*Todos*, 1993: 211-212).

In *Todos somos Kafka*, metaliterature, understood –as in the opening quotation from *Letra herida*– in the sense of limited “afán de sentirse prisionero del reino literario”, is used as a device to express and explore female literary-subjectivity

and authorship under a diverse multiplicity of stances that illustrate the intrahistorical female presence in the history of canonical literature. This chapter, divided into three sections, will analyse the process of female literary-subjectivity and authorship the novel deals with as a process of subject construction, understanding the subject as created through discourse, law and culture, agents and spheres of representation at the same time.¹ In order to do so, it is necessary to clarify the importance of metaliterature and to discuss whether or not it is a concept and whether or not it belongs to postmodern politics. Described as “afán”, beautiful though it may be, it also resists a fixed conceptualisation. Its limit is clear: exhaustion, “agotamiento”. It can also be assumed that it is a product of invention, as opposed to “la locura” which cannot be invented but is “infinita y variada”. The present section will isolate and explore the weight of what will be described as metaliterary discourse in Amat’s production. In order to do so, the two features of metaliterature, self-reflexivity and intertextuality, will be analysed. *Todos somos Kafka*, a novel written in a first-person form by “la lectora”, a female reader, is particularly suited to such a scrutiny because it narrates a quest for writing and writing, for her, is considered the destruction of every voice and, at the same time, the repetition of all voices, as can be ascertained from the second quotation.

¹ The concepts of discourse, law and culture have influenced feminist approaches to theories of subject construction, e.g. Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler or Kaja Silverman. Turning away from Cartesian dualism and grounding their analysis in nineteenth-century theorists such as Marx, Hegel and Freud, along with twentieth-century thinkers such as Althusser or Foucault in the case of Butler, feminists have enquired into the implications of those three concepts in the emergence of the subject. The treatment of the emergence of the subject should not be restricted to the analysis of *Todos somos Kafka*. The following chapters will uncover further the importance of the notion of the subject in Amat.

Metaliterature, never mentioned as such in Amat's texts until 1998, is the subject matter of her "libros sin voz". Besides, the presence of metaliterature permeates Amat's novelistic production: it influences the way the narrators phrase their textual representation. *Todos somos Kafka* can be situated half way between critical and narrative discourse. In the book, the genesis of a female authorial voice, her very particular relationship with an influential male authority and also her observation and dialogic interaction with canonical voices of the history of literature are the main discursive threads of the novel. These threads are ultimately recognised by the narrator as "callar y repetir" (*Todos*, 1993: 212). Silence and repetition are endless tasks she has to perform if she wants to exist in literature. However, these discursive threads will not hold the text cohesively. The desire for literary representation is what holds together the apparently chaotic texts with unnumbered chapters and deceptively unrelated titles². The nebulous nature of the text can only be explained by resorting to the idea of "sufrimiento creativo" (*Letra*, 1998: 171) which *Todos somos Kafka*, as a fantasy on writers and literary heroes, necessarily alleviates.

Having already stated that metaliterature conditions the characterisation of Amat's narrators and main characters, it becomes relevant to deal with metaliterature in relation to *Todos somos Kafka* because it is the only text by Amat in which the development of character is fully literary, exists only through fiction and without any reference to what we perceive as reality or the real world, which is totally absent

² The perplexing titles of *Todos somos Kafka* are grouped into three parts: "Sopa de muertos" (13-64), "Los manicomios están llenos de ropa interior" (64-142) and "Una rata en la academia" (64-224). The text finishes after the narration told by 'la lectora' is over. The fourth section, "Glosario Onomástico" (225-249) is made up of entries that succinctly (re)introduce the characters cited in the novel along with some other relevant literary names.

from the text. *Todos somos Kafka* is the literary text that happens in the mind of a female reader. In the novels that will be analysed in Part II, metaliterature is part of characterisation but in an introspective way. The uniqueness of the metaliterary explicitness of “la lectora” is, from this perspective, exceptional.

Towards the end of the book, she has identified the essence of her literary task. “Callar y repetir” (*Todos*, 1993: 212) and also thinking about the death of the author are acts that can only be simultaneously done in the place where she has arrived “por mis propios medios, aunque no por voluntad propia” (*Todos*, 1993: 211). These endless acts produce metaliterature. They do not necessarily produce narrative but generate a certain type of thought or, rather, they think literature insofar as they are performed in the silence of the mind. The repetition and the act of “callar” justify the inclusion of *Todos somos Kafka* in the group of the “libros sin voz”. On the other hand, it is the only “libro sin voz” that has, as novel, a plot and therefore a narrator, who happens to engage into a metaliterary quest and finishes in a silent exhaustion that is also an endlessness of literary thought. This endlessness of repetition can be understood, as Amat implies in the opening quotation from *Letra herida*, as “locura”.

The book is an appeal to ascertain how that entity called literature is psychically seen by whoever is active within it. In this way, literary roles are explored either attached to history through the reference of the name, or as literary abstractions. The destabilisation of authority and authorship belongs to a postmodern agenda and this is an issue addressed in *Todos somos Kafka*, through a reformulation

of the importance of naming, a reformulation that touches upon the referential metaliterary power of the name. The female French poet Colet, lover of Flaubert, Musset, Vigny and Victor Hugo explains to “la lectora” that

llamarse Louise Colet es casi como no tener nombre. Y el nombre, usted y yo sabemos, es el elemento primordial para convertirse en un escritor de influencia (*Todos*, 1993: 161).

Although the representational agenda of the texts that are going to be analysed in Part I shares postmodern sites of theoretical production, it cannot be concluded simply that *Todos somos Kafka* is solely an example of postmodern fiction. According to Hutcheon’s (1988) views on postmodernism, *Todos somos Kafka* could be regarded as a piece of historiographic metafiction. The text is formally chaotic insofar as there is no self-consciousness about form which would be the requirement to see *Todos somos Kafka* as a piece of postmodern narrative. Formal aspects are never textually addressed although the form of literature, in its sheer abstraction, is.

The separation between the literary and the historical is, according to Hutcheon (1988), being contested by postmodernist writing. Postmodern novels recall that history and fiction are historical terms in their own right and that their definitions and the interrelations they can be subjected to, are historically determined and therefore vary with time. Alter’s ground-breaking text on self-consciousness in the novel exposes a major point of interest: the delimitation of an object of study. He is interested in a type of novel that

expresses its seriousness through playfulness, that is acutely aware of itself as a mere structure of words even as it tries to discover ways of going beyond words to experiences words seek to indicate (1975: ix).

He conclusively characterises the novel as the only inexhaustible genre insofar as it has evolved towards deeper levels of self-consciousness, although there has always been self-consciousness, once the tide of modernism has ebbed. He acknowledges that most self-conscious narratives, from *Lazarillo de Tormes* or *Don Quijote* to *Ficciones*,

lend themselves splendidly to analytic criticism because they operate by the constant redeployment of fiction's formal categories. Is the critic interested in the narrative manipulation of time, the arbitrariness of narrative beginnings, the writer's awareness of literary conventions, the manoeuvring of language to produce multiple meanings, the expressive possibilities of punctuation, paragraphing, typography? (1975: 220).

The appeal to a metaliterary practice is implicit if not expanded in the quotation above. But it is not named. The only thing that needs to be done is to replace the word critic by "literary-subject". In *Todos somos Kafka*, a female literary-subject manipulates the linear time of the history of literature, shows the total arbitrariness of any writing as soon as she starts narrating her own story, and plays not just with literary conventions, but with literary expectations and literary representational establishment in itself. This could be defined as metaliterature and not, as Hutcheon does, historiographic metafiction. The most exhaustive approach to the relationship between history and fiction has been Hutcheon's exploration of what she regards as historiographic metafiction, a postmodern manifestation par excellence and quite

similar, as she admits (1988: 221), to what David Caute (1972) has called dialectical literature. Both denominations, and also Alter's, tally with a postmodern politics of representation. And as Hutcheon states,

postmodern novels raise a number of specific issues regarding the interaction of historiography and fiction that deserve more detailed study: issues surrounding the nature of identity and subjectivity; the question of reference and representation; the intertextual nature of the past; and the ideological implications of writing about history (1988: 117).

The convenience of the label postmodernism, a quasi-mythical term in critical theory, has always been, nevertheless, problematic. Waugh prefers to talk about narcissistic or metafictional narrative, paradoxically criticising the postmodernist debate for being "primarily concerned with the psychological, philosophical, ideological or social causes of the flourishing self-consciousness of our culture" (1980: 3). She accepts that something important has changed within our culture mainly in the Romantic and modernist periods and points out that "the focus of a debate on the causes of the change must necessarily be on the perpetrator of the change –the author" (1980: 3). Along these lines, Alter sustains that

the consciousness of imagery, poetry, all the apparatus of literary tradition, as means to a human coherence that can be set over against the awaiting abyss is especially central in the writing of Virginia Woolf (1975: 149).

The perception of literary tradition as an apparatus, that is to say, as a system in motion, subjected to the interpretation and interconnectedness of its own production

through literary, philosophical or historical practices, imbues literary practice with self-reflexivity. *Todos somos Kafka* establishes a mimetic relationship with the reality of literature or rather, with literature as reality. From the first page of the book, the narrator's quest is clear: she is determined to write a novel. In order to do so, she refers to the sphere of representation she, as compulsive reader, knows best: literature. Once she emerges as both "escritora" and "lectora", she becomes subject and object of the text at the same time. As a result, her fictionalisation gets trapped in metaliterature and her novel becomes a metanovel. Metaliterature grows into an obsession for her, her obsession to *be* in literature originates her metaliterary discourse, related to the narrator being female and to the marginality of female presence in the history of literature.

As regards referentiality, considered a key definitional point by Waugh, Alter and Hutcheon, the relationship between reality and fiction and therefore the locality of truth is also addressed by "la lectora", who is afraid of confusing literature and life when it comes to characterisation:³

[...] confundir, por ejemplo, al personaje Franz Kafka, escritor, padre de la lectora con el que fuera en verdad padre de la lectora en el caso de que la lectora no fuera un personaje y tuviera tras de sí un padre que ahora estaría sumamente apenado al leer todo cuanto su hija lectora es capaz de inventar y escribir sobre el afligido padre (*Todos*, 1993: 35).

³ For further information on the relationship between truth and fiction, see Patricia Waugh's much acclaimed "Are novelists liars? The ontological status of literary-fictional discourse" in her *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984: 87-114).

This representational fear has to be related to her disdainful comments on those who read novels simply as a “crónica de la autora disfrazada de narradora” (*Todos*, 1993: 19). Her discourse implicitly addresses the notions of author, narrator, memory and autobiography. The cause of psychosis for Lacan is the foreclosure of the signifier for the sake of the acquisition of a name of one’s own. Reference and naming are crucial issues in the text. *Todos somos Kafka* can be viewed as an act of perpetual foreclosure perpetrated by “la lectora”, a narrator who does not have a proper name. This problematises her subjectivity further but, at the same time, it is what turns it into narrative. Lacking a proper signifier does not mean she also lacks a signified. Referentiality is, however, altered. By turning literary names into characters, the figures of dead writers, dead editors and the women related to them, settle into a signifying frame. The proper name becomes a signifier whose signified is intertextual and self-reflexive: Nora and Lucia Joyce impersonated and narrated respectively by “la lectora” are good examples of this.

The narrator reflects her female self on them and she also does it when impersonating the fictive daughter of Kafka. Such an individual never existed. Her first-person voice narrates James Joyce and Lucia through a subversion of signification:

A los seguidores de Joyce les parecerá raro, cuando no una falta de respeto histórico, que su ídolo se casara con una mujer lectora (con todo lo que implica de narradora una lectora pura) que sólo tenía en común con Nora Barnacle el cabello castaño y la “r” de Nora y lectora. Pero de un hombre apasionado por las letras puras puede también esperarse su unión sentimental con la lectora (*Todos*, 1993: 75).

This “unión sentimental con la lectora”, to be symbolically expected since she is also in love with literature, taken in a generic sense, is thematised not only in *Todos somos Kafka* but also in *El ladrón de libros*. The impact of Joyce’s works in the mind of Nora can only be discussed by finding out or, if this is not possible, imagining how she read him, if she did at all, and whether her own reading had any signification or influenced in any way the evolution of Joyce’s writing. “La lectora” is constructing a discourse that takes literary development to the extreme, by using narrative to find hypothetical literary silences and fill them with literary signification. In a way, this is tantamount to narrating the unconscious elements of literary production, or rather, creating hypotheses about what lies behind literature in order to narrate the female presence. What was the real importance of Nora Barnacle in Joyce, the individual who lived and wrote? What could or should a reader fond of *Ulysess* or of *Finnegan’s Wake* know about the environment in which they were created? As far as the equation between the personal and the political on the one hand and the personal and the literary on the other, “la lectora” without a doubt defends that

[...] el narrador-narrador, desde siempre, por mucho que los lectores fatuos insistan en negarlo, no ha hecho otra cosa que introducir elementos autobiográficos en sus novelas. [...] Cuando un narrador no tiene más padre que otro narrador la única alternativa que le queda para superar la existencia del desdichado padre es convertirlo en el héroe de la tal novela que no será nunca del todo una novela. La misma lectora, cuando se pone a investigar sobre su pasado, sólo alcanza a recordar anécdotas literarias. Y con estos datos es como empieza y termina su biografía. Cuando la lectora recuerda, le vienen a la mente esas vivencias literarias. Y la lectora, para convertirlas en literatura, no tiene más remedio que disfrazarlas de anécdotas personales. Investigando en los intersticios de la intimidad de un autor es tal vez como el narrador descubre el modo en que el autor escribe una novela, tal vez

encuentra su verdadero padre, tal vez se desencuentre a sí mismo tratando de escribir novelas (*Todos*, 1993: 36).

The issue of where the plot of this novel takes place or where the main narrative voice is speaking from is both clear and indefinite. Clear because the narrators created by Amat are always implicated in the literature scene and nowhere is this more actively pursued than in the text under discussion: the plot of *Todos somos Kafka* only happens in the mind. Indefinite because the voice cannot be fully isolated within the text. By definition, metaliterature is, then, self-reflexive and intertextual and it will be the exploration of the notion of the subject which will momentarily cede a discursive path that can only be regarded as metaliterary. In *Todos somos Kafka*, “la lectora”, has her individuality framed by a literary activity: reading. Lacking a proper name but being designated by what she does is her passport into the sphere of representation where her subjection is going to take place. The sphere of representation against which the subject is placed is not social, i.e. Real, but literary, i.e. Symbolic. It belongs to the Imaginary.

If definitions and explorations on metalanguage, metafiction and metanarrative abound in postmodern politics, metaliterature has been used only by Amat. However, neither postmodernists nor Amat have defined it. All these concepts necessarily have to be defined in relation to the term coming after the prefix, the term that founds meaning. In this way, the definition of literature would found the meaning of metaliterature. The explanation of what that abstract entity called literature might be unites the books with which Part I deals. This justifies the

presence, as literary topoi, of components of what might be termed the literary act. The text, the writer, the reader, the context, in a nutshell, all the components of the literary act understood as a process of communication are conceptualised through narrative strategies. The narrator of *Todos somos Kafka* defines literature as “el país donde hasta lo ridículo es posible” (*Todos*, 1993: 200) and also as “una suerte de religión a ultranza” (*Todos*, 1993: 201). If, both being abstract ideas, metaliterature is taken as desire for representation, then it has to be concluded that not only do we move into the area of subjectivity but also into a psychoanalytical dimension. It can be concluded that the limit of metaliterature can be challenged and maybe also that if it is not a concept, if it is not fixed and its end is only exhaustion then what is perceived as “locura” might sustain, as “la lectora” implies, the endlessness or vagueness of the concept.

Silence and the impossibility of truth mark the entrance into literary representation. This causes not only literary representation but also the representation of literature to become implicated and expressed by fiction. In respect of the Real, foreclosure of the signifier is therefore perpetrated. Metaliterature is inaugurated. If narratologists were consistently followed, terms like metafiction or master-narrative should be chosen to discuss this text. If, on the other hand, Amat’s own discussion on the self-reflexive, but not solipsistic, turn of her literature is taken into consideration, the term metaliterature becomes essential and also more significant than the more metageneric notion of metanovel. Authors such as Hutcheon, Waugh, Alter and others have written enough and well about the subject of metafiction and, as regards

metaliterature, Nuria Amat herself has explored it widely as a key discursive element of her prose, an element that will gain more importance as Part I progresses. Amat does not name metaliterature until 1998; postmodernism never named the concept. It may be because to name the idea one has to narrate, as “la lectora” does, and as the omniscient discourse of the other “libros sin voz” does as well.

The relationship between metaliterature and female literary-subjectivity is essential in the development of Amat’s fiction. Besides, without metaliterature, understood, as has been discussed in this section, as the gap that lies between self-reflexivity and intertextuality and as a treatment of literary substance with a postmodernist tinge, female literary-subjectivity cannot be approached. The subjectivity of Amat’s female narrators can only be fully understood by appealing to the understanding of literature their texts communicate in a more or less explicit way. The next section will explore the voice of “la lectora”, the most explicitly metaliterary of Amat’s narrators. By understanding the influence and importance of metaliterature the beginnings of her quest are instituted.

2. THE SELF-REFLEXIVE “LECTORA”:

FIRST-PERSON VOICE AND THE INTERTEXT

Una hija lectora será siempre la mejor lectora de un padre escritor, en el caso de que esa hija haya dedicado toda su infancia y después toda su adolescencia y el resto de su vida a leer en secreto a su padre escritor, a escondidas, sin que la vieran que es la mejor manera de aprender de un escritor, y no digamos si el escritor es el propio padre (*Todos*, 1993: 28).

Una niña puede no ser nada cuando observa a un escritor escribiendo detrás de la puerta, pero la misma niña deja rastros de su paso en el orden neurótico de las cosas personales de un escritor adulto (*Todos*, 1993: 29).

The act of reading the father in secrecy –“a escondidas” (*Todos*, 1993: 28)– claiming at the same time that it is the best way of learning from a writer –“de un escritor”– indirectly poses a crucial question connected to metaliterature and to the areas of female literary-subjectivity and authorship. A child, boy or girl, embodies an early and difficult subjectivity state. Although the childhood exposed in the opening quotation could simply be read as a symbolic abstraction related to the not yet accomplished advent of literary-subjectivity, literary awareness becomes part and parcel of the narration in the same way that the necessarily substantial changes in the narrative development of a child’s characterisation would be narratively relevant in order to turn his or her life into plot. She is reading and learning, engaged in a metaliterary quest of representation in which self-reflexivity and intertextuality

concur. Potentially, the symbolic or literary father and the symbolic or psychically represented daughter are acting as each other's intertext. If gender awareness were sustained, it would be far too simplistic a conclusion to affirm that once she becomes a writer, they both will share the same literary position. That is the position from which "la lectora" who has become "escritora" interprets her past situation in respect to him. But, as will be considered in this section, there is more happening before that anagnorisis occurs. It has to be remembered that she is going to inscribe gender on the body of the literary characters she is going to give voice to. She will, however, not inscribe gender on herself although genderisation is part of the other women characters, characters she sometimes narrates, sometimes impersonates. The first of these impersonations is the little girl. "La lectora" narrates the silence of the child and fills it with meaning and, in so doing, empowers it. This is only possible because reality has been cancelled, the sphere of representation is entirely psychic, symbolic and, most important, literary; and literature, for her, "carece de lugar, de tiempo y hasta de espacio" (*Todos*, 1993: 113).

This girl is introduced to the reader by "la lectora", who recognises herself in the character. However, "la lectora", when narrating, detaches herself from that image that is her and, in this way, consolidates a narrative object that is her fiction of her, a fiction of and on the 'I' narrating. Subject and object reflect each other but remain separate at the same time. This is a feature *Todos somos Kafka* shares with Amat's first published novel *Pan de boda* (1979) and also with her more recent *El país del alma* (1999): the coexistence between first- and third- person narrative

voice. It can be maintained that subject and object reflect each other but remain separate at the same time. “La lectora” does not pretend to create norms for the alter-ego she introduces. The other impersonations “la lectora” assumes are going to be representationally similar. Nora Joyce and Kafka’s daughter are and are not her. They are a position she adopts with respect to two of her favourite writers, James Joyce and Franz Kafka, and they are also a symbolic practice she textually undertakes. Ultimately, these fictive characters are metaliterary constructions and acts of *becoming*, not *being*, literary-subjects. This is precisely the reason why the narrator can explore genderisation as an act of becoming, not of being, a view sustained by Butler and Jehlen, among others. The double signification of the word “género” in Spanish amalgamates in the works of Nuria Amat. This amalgamation will eventually sum up her literary poetics and also explains the evolution of her narrative, as will be discussed in Part II. From the unpublished early novel *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* to the recently appeared *El país del alma*, key contemporary critical and narrative themes such as suicide and identity, madness and the melancholic subject, the shared symbolic space of the dead mother and the orphaned girl or the relationship between silence and discourse, come into literary being.

The opening quotation for this section does not talk about a man writing but actually about a writer, a man involved in the literary scene by a right of production and/or creativity and who, being a father, has engendered the girl who observes but does not write yet. The power of representation of this literary child is, at that stage, still marginal. All this is narrated by the adult “lectora” in the process of becoming a

writer herself. What she is narrating is the mutual influence between her, desiring literature, and him, part of the literary canon. They are both influencing each other. Her influence on him is psychological. If feminism has reappropriated psychoanalysis using gender as a subversive catalyst and reformulating the dogmatic status of Freudian theories, in Amat's text the same can be said to be happening: dogmas are being contested and gender awareness is being used to do so. "La lectora" will remain in his unconscious because she does not have the power of the word he has. She is still a child and a child that reads and therefore interprets in secrecy. However, it has to be noted that what she desires is literature, or rather, literary representation.

The girl does not turn her father into an object of desire as Freud's allegedly universal psychoanalytical theory puts forward as determinant for the configuration of the female psyche. What shapes and conditions the psychic is the desire for representation, for otherness:

Lo veo leer, lo veo escribir, lo veo dormir y me veo a mí escritora. Veo que puede morir de un momento a otro, de tan delicado y frágil que dicen que es mi padre, y que alguien, que no puede ser otra que yo, debe ocupar su cama y su lectura. Me siento la heredera de mi literario padre. Su sucesora. [...] ¿Qué se hace con un muerto? Esta pregunta me preocupa y me obsesiona todavía ahora que ya casi sé lo que se hace con un muerto (*Todos*, 1993: 28-29).

And she then names the literary father: Kafka. He is the author who is ignorant of the girl reading him in secrecy and writing from an "ahora", a present of awareness troubled by the question "¿Qué se hace con un muerto?". Interestingly enough, she

seems to be on the verge of discovering it: she nearly knows what to do with “un muerto” (*Todos*, 1993: 29). However, she does not have a final answer to this question. This is the essential narrative trait of *Todos somos Kafka*, this is what “la lectora” wants to find out: what shall she do with the dead writers or, in other words, what her position in respect of the canon should be when she writes. Their influence cannot be denied, intertextuality ultimately is literature. It is there, it exists. On the other hand, self-reflexivity becomes an issue too, since representing her self in literature is done by producing a text that, being literary, will reflect them, the canonical, in the same way it is supposed to reflect her. If this can only be achieved because they ultimately share the same symbolic space, all of them being engaged in the same symbolic practice –literature–, one might question the role of psychosis in this achievement. “La lectora” relates literature to what might be perceived as mental disorder:

La literatura es una enfermedad y yo estoy presa de ese estado morbosos. Y entonces, leo. Me dispongo a leer palabra tras palabra del primero de los libros que tengo entre las manos. Me pierdo en el tiempo. Siempre estás leyendo, me dicen. No puedes hacer otra cosa que no sea leer. Lees demasiado. Oigo voces. Ése es el síntoma. Los escritores locos se dan cuenta de su locura cuando escuchan voces (*Todos*, 1993: 197).

This excerpt, taken from the chapter entitled “La estantería hipotética” (*Todos*, 1993: 195-197) characterises the narrator of *Todos somos Kafka* as a voracious reader of the canon. She feels nostalgia for all the dead writers that she admires and that stand on the shelves of the library, also admiring the hypothetical bookshelf contained in

their minds. “La lectora” understands literature to be not only “una enfermedad” or “estado morboso” (197) but also “el país donde hasta lo ridículo es posible” (*Todos*, 1993: 200). Although she will not find out what to do with the dead canon, she does come to the conclusion that “todos somos Kafka” (*Todos*, 1993: 200). Inside the symbolic sphere of representation in which the book is written and metaliterary discourse produced, everyone is Kafka. We are all Kafka. The reader who writes is metamorphosed into Kafka. It does not make a difference whether texts exist as books or not. Texts can exist marginally in the mind in the same way that marginal literary-subjects, women for example, remained on the margins of the life of certain authors. In this way, there is an endlessness of being that is nothing but an endless act of becoming always in the literary. The ultimate act of self-reflexivity consists in the merging of the desired literary act, the text produced in the mind, with the text that *is* on paper, in the book. This endlessness of being is so difficult to conceive that it even borders on the ridiculous, the ironic, the parodic: literature, “el país donde hasta lo ridículo es posible” (*Todos*, 1993: 200). On the other hand, it applies both to acts of self-representation and acts of self-interpretation: “Ahora me busco a mí misma” (*Todos*, 1993: 200). In this way, she concludes that

«[...] Mi padre es Kafka... Todos somos Kafka. Joyce, mi esposo, es, o podría haber sido, James Joyce. En toda lectora, además de un padre escritor, siempre hay un esposo escritor, a lo James Joyce y su hija loca.»

Salgo de nuevo de la biblioteca. Salgo y entro. Entro y salgo. [...]

Cuando estoy dentro pienso: «Tengo a la hija de Joyce, Lucia Joyce, loca de remate, y a la esposa de Kafka, a quien los desatinos de Kafka hicieron volver loca. Todas las esposas de los santos literarios acaban locas. Ahora bien, ¿quién no me asegura que Lucia Joyce y la esposa de Kafka no sean la misma persona, si se da el caso de que ambas estén locas? De ser así no me queda otra salida que ser la hija de la hija de Joyce, que, a su vez, es la esposa de Kafka. ¡Qué escándalo para los

ministros de la literatura haber llegado a una conclusión parecida después de años y años de pruebas, refutaciones y verificaciones! De ahí se explican mis delirios kafkianos y joyceanos [...]»

No es tan claro, sin embargo.

Aunque, puestos a creer (la literatura es una suerte de religión a ultranza), tampoco sería tan extraño.

Los resultados de este parentesco me tranquilizan. [...] Mientras no venga un psiquiatra y me demuestre lo contrario. El pasillo es largo. Camino hasta el final del mismo, preparada a echar por tierra toda teoría psiquiátrica que me salga al paso.

Mirando a diestra y siniestra.

Los psiquiatras se esconden.

Cabe también la hipótesis de que sea yo Lucia, hija de Joyce, y la esposa de Kafka [...] (*Todos*, 1993: 200-201).

Literature appears to be a state of the mind, the state the narrator's mind is in and the state of the narrative discourse the text conforms, a text consciously made of textual substance that is overtly literary.⁴ What is or has been merges with what could have been and never was, but which can be when the psyche invents it and makes it exist in silence. The central issue addressed throughout the apparent literary turmoil textually exhibited in *Todos somos Kafka*, of which the quotation mentioned above is an excellent example, is whether the desire of the real or fictitious female writer can ever be totally satisfied. Of course, the answer for structuralists and psychoanalysts alike would be a categorical "no". Only in a metanovel and only through metaliterary discourse could this categorical "no" be explored and challenged thus possibly abbreviating even further the "sufrimiento creativo" (*Letra*, 1998: 171) metaliterature, according to Amat, actually alleviates. This is also what one could abstract from reading key theories of subject construction and applying them to literature. Having already stated that the identity of "la lectora" is based on her lack

⁴ In Amat's recently published novel *El país del alma*, the influence of literature as symbolic practice in the configuration and formalisation of the female psyche is a crucial narrative strand, maybe the most important one, as will be discussed in Part II.

of a proper name, it has to be affirmed that this feature actually problematises her subjectivity further but, at the same time, is what turns it into narrative. Once “la lectora” emerges as both “escritora” and “lectora”, she becomes subject and object of the text at the same time. All she can produce is fiction and the fictionalisation of her discourse is generated through an inexhaustible metaliterary turn that solidifies itself in a text that can be characterized as a metanovel.

This way of naming herself helps the already mentioned interplay between the third and first person, which alternates and confuses literary roles or rather, the literary-subject positions of narrator and character. The confusion happens inside the library she keeps coming in and out of: “salgo y entro. Entro y salgo” (*Todos*, 1993: 200). “La lectora” is determined to write a novel about how to write. In order to do so, she refers to the sphere of representation she, as compulsive reader, knows best: literature. But once she gets into this sphere of representation that dwells in the library, the unitary relationship between signifier and signified disappears and, as far as female literary-subjects are concerned, everything becomes possible. Everything is a matter of believing: “[...] puestos a creer” (*Todos*, 1993: 201). Hypotheses can be infinite: Joyce’s daughter, Kafka’s wife, all the women implicated in the literary scene and labelled as mad, all of them co-exist in her mind because she is reading, has read them, will always be part of the space of her reading because she cannot avoid seeing the female presence around dead male writers. And in the same way that this presence can be seen, it can also be constructed. The narrator’s discourse gives relevance to the human figures surrounding the text as literary element and,

through them, possible female influence in literature is thus given material presence. The literary figure of the author is personified in *Todos somos Kafka*. Canonical dead authors are brought back to life in the text by endowing them with the narrative gift of characterisation thus allowing them to speak forth and discuss their position in literature.

Irony serves the purpose of separating the literary language “la lectora” uses throughout from literary language in the abstract. This touches the structural use of irony in the book. In his essay “Structure”, John Carlos Rowe appositely relates irony and structure and states that

the rhetorical trope of irony is fundamental to literature, which uses the trope to distinguish its own special language from that of ordinary experience. As a principle of “structure”, irony is thus quite similar to the *ostranenie* or strategic “estrangement of the familiar” that the Russian formalists considered essential to literary language. For most New Critics, literary “structure” was achieved by the systematic *negation* of the empirical domain. By the same token, this cancellation of ordinary empirical experience or data allowed the artist to concentrate on the purely ideal determinations of our thought (in Lentricchia & McLaughlin 1995 [1990]: 32-33).

In *Todos somos Kafka*, ironic language distinguishes the psychic from the real and helps invert the components of both. Names of real authors are ultimately used for ironic purposes and estrangement of what is literarily familiar is produced. Furthermore, not only is “la lectora” an ironic subject and a female narrator that does not really undergo the genderisation characters are supposed to compulsorily go through, her irony also makes it possible for her to become Kafka’s daughter, as she states in the lengthy quotation (*Todos*, 1993: 200-201). “La lectora” narrates literature intrahistorically. Generating female literary-subjectivity and the obsession

of getting the knack of literary creation are, then, processes that sustain a text that blends literary-subjectivity and subjectivisation. The result of this interaction is the location of sites in which the female subject is trying to *be* or *become*, representatively, in literature. The act of becoming a literary-subject, the quest of “la lectora”, can only be undertaken through a course of action that, generally speaking, can be reduced to the essential act of keeping subjectivity going, i.e. never foreclosing the continuum of the signifier through the text. In psychoanalytical terms, this is tantamount to maintaining the desire for representation. This motivation influences the form of *Todos somos Kafka* and its challenge to generic expectations.

Todos somos Kafka reflects the different acts of becoming a female literary-subject, the generic ones, writer and reader, and the ones that *were* and can only *become* in the text through the will of “la lectora”, through her becoming a writer but still being a reader. The Barthesian death of the author somehow puts forward the idea that writing is a suicidal act and that the writer dies in the text in the sense that the voice of the writer dies in the text. Literary practice is thus being characterised as self-reflexive and intertextual. Furthermore, only by assuming that the writing is literary can it be concluded that the writer dies. If writing is the destruction of every voice and is the space where the subject perpetually slips away, then to perpetually slip away should imply perpetually being engaged in an act of becoming through the intertext, never quite being, perpetually self-reflexive and intertextual. On the other hand, throughout the text, “la lectora” narrates her imaginary encounters with dead writers. “La lectora” reads in order to construct her identity as a writer. Her narration

turns canonical authors into characters. By giving them voice, she finds out the mapping of literature in their minds. But this is a self-reflexive act: as characters, these authors can exist only because she has read them. Waugh states that

the use of names in traditional fiction is usually part of an aim to disguise the fact that there is no difference between the name and the thing named: to disguise this purely verbal existence. Metafiction, on the other hand, aims to focus attention precisely on the problem of reference (1984: 93).

From this perspective, Amat's novel would be an example of metafiction. However, the problem of names and the power of naming has wider implications in the text. "La lectora" is the only character who does not have a proper name. But that does not mean she is anonymous, like the suicidal male writer who turns out to be all writers that have existed and are dead. The rest of the names in the book are literary names, names that belong in a meaningful way to the history of literature. The names that appear in the book do so in a self-reflexive fashion: their appearance sets forth an act of questioning their historical and literary status: infinitely self-reflexive and intertextual, as her own detached and self-reflexive words communicate,

La lectora ejerce como escritora en un tiempo en que ya no existen narradores ni escritores auténticos, sólo repeticiones de lo que en su día fueron auténticos escritores; en una época en la que ya han dejado de existir personajes, sólo repeticiones de lo que en su día fueron auténticos personajes (*Todos*, 1993: 69).

3. METALITERARY ANAGNORISIS:

ON AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY

Debo hacerme a la idea (básica, por otra parte) de que lo que yo busco no existe. Cuando menos, ahora ya sé por qué no existe. Sé, por fin, que el joven escritor desconocido [...] ya no tiene nombre. [...]

Y es ahora cuando descubro que la autora tampoco tiene nombre. Lo más extraordinario que a una lectora puede sucederle en la vida es ignorar su propio nombre, en especial cuando tiene la certeza absoluta de que algún día lo tuvo y fue reconocida por ese nombre. [...]

Pero estoy preocupada, sobre todo ahora que he descubierto que carezco de nombre y de alguien al que no le importe que carezca de nombre [...].

Me pregunto si en este lugar caótico, donde falta todo y nada, existirá alguna administración, algún tipo de secretaría en la que informen al visitante sobre la variedad de nombres. Una forma de tener nombre es llegar a un lugar destinado a reclamar el nombre. Pedir el nombre significa indagar en los orígenes de tu nombre (*Todos*, 1993: 199).

“Pedir el nombre” (*Todos*, 1993: 199) in literature entails a search for one’s origins.⁵ The text “la lectora” has produced is naturally implicated in the literary scene. It is this self-reflexive feature that allows the term metaliterature to gain outstanding relevance. Metaliterature, by definition, has to be a reflection on literature. This very basic definition has served to illustrate that there is a self-

⁵ According to Althusser’s influential doctrine of interpellation, the subject comes into being as a consequence of language, yet is always within its terms. As in other parts of her theoretical formulations, gender critic Judith Butler’s (1997) interpretation of the Althusserian approach summons a certain theory of metatextuality to the scene. Butler’s interpretation of Althusser is worthy of note because it shows how metaliterary discourse symbolically engages in a mimetic relationship of reflection with the Real:

Interpellation [...] is not an event, but a certain way of staging the call, where the call, as staged, becomes deliteralized in the course of its exposition [...] (Butler 1997: 107).

Asking for the name is a self-reflexive inversion. It is the subject that takes control of interpellation and, instead of deliteralizing, makes it literary through exposition, i.e., through textuality.

reflexive relationship between literature and the term with the prefix. The relationship between them will be explored again from another angle in *Viajar es muy difícil. Manual de ruta para lectores periféricos* (1995). Instead of privileging the notion of subject, emphasis will be given to the concept of journey, transition and movement as forces that have determined the form of literature. Subjectivity and subjectivisation will still be important but, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the prescriptive look that can be abstracted from metaliterary discourse will be relevant.

The originality of *Todos somos Kafka* lies in the combination of a metaliterary quest for representation on the part of the narrator with the treatment of the female presence in literature. This quest for representation is a feature that generically places *Todos somos Kafka* in close proximity to the *bildungsroman*. This generic nearness, a vicinity of form, contrasts with the displacement of the social, the typical sphere of representation the *bildungsroman* is textually constructed against, by the literary, the sphere of representation against which the process of subject formation undertaken by “la lectora” is going to occur. However, generic nearness can only be regarded as a vicinity of form if observed through the lens of parody. This is related to the ironic tone of the narrator’s discourse and, ultimately, to the lack of cohesion the book displays. Judith Butler’s description of the workings of parody for the social construct of gender functions also for the description of the workings of parody for the literary construct of genre:

the parodic repetition of “the original” [...] reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original (Butler 1990: 31).

Todos somos Kafka parodically repeats canonical elements of the history of literature and frames them into a narrative structure sustained by the use of irony. The relationship between gender and genre, both concepts that support politics of representation, conditions this female reader in her attempt to become authorial subject. She keeps her own literary-subjectivisation going in order to conclude that, ultimately, we are all Kafka, regardless of the gender and the genre representation adopts.⁶ Authorship and authority are both mirages.

The text begins with two very meaningful paragraphic sentences: “Cerré el libro” and “Entonces vi su cara” (*Todos*, 1993: 13). The former fully identifies the narrator’s self-defining activity: she is “la lectora”, the activity of reading defines her. The latter introduces a face, his face, the face of a suicidal male writer, the ideal protagonist of the novel “la lectora” is determined to write. As she acknowledges, “ésta es la historia de una lectora y un escritor suicida” (*Todos*, 1993: 13). “La lectora” feels initially proud of having prevented the anonymous writer, but not author, from throwing himself out of the window and dying. As part of her literary quest, she is determined to find out who the “escritor desconocido” (*Todos*, 1993: 25) and also “escritor nato” (*Todos*, 1993: 14) is. Like her, he lacks a proper name. Her compulsive reading has made her realise that the name and naming are important

⁶ The author’s gender awareness has left an imprint in the design of the book. The cover, chosen by the author, shows a reproduction by Romaine Brooks, entitled *Peter (A Young English Girl)*, a female dandy painted in 1923-1924, National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. Another female dandy, also painted by Romaine Brooks appears on the cover of *Monstruos* (1990): *Una: Lady Troubridge* (fragment, 1924).

literary facts. The contrast with the end of the novel is disquieting. The writer stands in front of the open window, at the same point where “la lectora” found him at the beginning of her text. Her literary quest has finished and seems to be at the same literary level as he is. Not only does she inhabit a space called literature she also inhabits a place called “locura”. Both are made of silence and repetition:

—Qué necesidad tengo de regresar nuevamente a la locura si ya estoy en ella— digo, tratando de dirigirme ya no sé si al diablo, al poeta o al aire crepuscular del cuarto. —Callar y repetir.

Mi actitud enfurece al poeta.

Abre la ventana. Mira hacia abajo. “¿Qué habrá abajo?”, me pregunto. Y algo me lleva a sospechar que ya he dado con ello. “El vacío de siempre”, me digo.

[el poeta] es aquel escritor que a punto estuvo de decir adiós tirándose por la ventana y todos aquellos escritores que llegaron o no a lanzarse al vacío a través de una ventana.

—Al fin lo he encontrado— digo. [...]

La ventana sigue abierta. Perdida en mis disparates, me doy cuenta de que Rimbaud hace rato ya que ha desaparecido.

Pese a todo ha conseguido tirarse. Y entre tanto divago y no hago nada para salvarlo.

«Será para otra vez» me consuelo. [...]

Hasta que, por fin, abro el libro o la ventana y también me tiro (*Todos*, 1993: 223-224).⁷

⁷ The symbolic importance of the window will be discussed in the chapter devoted to *La intimidad* (1997). The relationship between the woman’s gaze from the window and narrative creation has been delineated by Carmen Martín Gaité:

Nadie puede enjaular los ojos de una mujer que se acerca a una ventana, ni prohibirles que surquen el mundo hasta confines ignotos. En todos los claustros, cocinas, estrados y gabinetes de la literatura universal donde viven mujeres existe una ventana fundamental para la narración [...] (1987: 15).

And also:

La ventana es el punto de referencia de que dispone [la mujer] para soñar desde dentro el mundo que bulle fuera, es el puente tendido entre las orillas de lo conocido y lo desconocido, la única brecha por donde puede echar a volar sus ojos, en busca de otra luz y de otros perfiles que no sean los del interior, que contrasten con éstos.

Trasladando esta situación al campo de la experiencia literaria, podría decirse que si alguna diferencia existe entre el discurso de los hombres y el de las mujeres, radica en su particular enfoque —no siempre perceptible a primera vista—; en una localización más precisa y concreta que nunca olvida sus propios límites, sus puntos cardinales. La ventana condiciona un tipo de mirada: mirar sin ser visto. Consiste en mirar lo de fuera desde un reducto interior, perspectiva determinada, en última instancia, por esa condición ventanera tan arraigada en la mujer española y que los hombres no suelen tener. Me atrevo a decir [...]

Those final words, that ‘me too’, places “la lectora” at the point where she found the writer at the beginning, by the window. When *Todos somos Kafka* is opened by the reader or critic, “la lectora”, the narrator, starts the first chapter –“La cita”– with the sentence “Cerré el libro” (*Todos*, 1993: 13). When her narration ends and the reader or critic is about to close *Todos somos Kafka*, “la lectora” opens the book or the window. One might wonder whether this implies her self-recognition as an author. As such, she undergoes the Barthesian death. It can be said that *Todos somos Kafka* is ultimately a monumentalisation of the power of the reader:

[...] ese poder de que disponemos [...] de evitar suicidios o, por el contrario, provocar otras tantas muertes mediante el mero gesto de abrir y cerrar un libro [...] (*Todos*, 1993: 14).

This monumentalisation actually supersedes Barthes. The text takes over at the place where Barthesian theory stops. He laid out a utopic reader, one that could only exist in fiction:

[...] un texte est fait d'écritures multiples, issues de plusieurs cultures et qui entrent les unes avec les autres en dialogue, en parodie, en contestation; mais il y a un lieu où cette multiplicité se rassemble, et ce lieu, ce n'est pas l'auteur, comme on l'a dit jusqu'à présent, c'est le lecteur: le lecteur est l'espace même où s'inscrivent, sans qu'aucune ne se perde, toutes les citations dont est faite une destination, mais cette destination ne peut plus être personnelle: le lecteur est un homme sans histoire, sans

que la vocación de escritura como deseo de liberación y expresión de desahogo, ha germinado muchas veces a través del marco de una ventana. La ventana es el punto de enfoque, pero también el punto de partida (1987: 36-37).

If a generational analysis was established between Martín Gaité and Amat, the gender awareness of the latter would contrast with the subliminal reference to gender made by the former. See the second chapter of Part II.

biographie, sans psychologie; il est seulement ce *quelqu'un* qui tient rassemblées dans un même champ toutes les traces dont est constitué l'écrit (Barthes 1968: 495).

This is the reader Amat has attempted to create in *Todos somos Kafka*, a reader whose defining activity is actively reflected in her quest to satisfy the desire to write. Between desire and writing lies something: metaliterature, an occupation that is utopic and that “la lectora” textualises. It could be concluded that, from this point of view, what she has done in her text is two things: firstly, imagining Barthes insofar as the novel is a text whose plot is only mental; secondly, there is the book, the pages the reader turns, a material result that is a literary text on Barthesian views. As such, it is a product of the endless “oficio” of “la lectora”:

Mi oficio no guarda relación alguna con la tarea de escribir o publicar libros. Mi oficio ni tan siquiera consiste en leerlos, aunque la lectura sea una práctica inmanente a mi oficio. Tampoco consiste en ordenar los libros en una biblioteca. Alguien podría pensar que me dedico a hacer resúmenes de ellos y difundirlos como si tal cosa. Mi oficio es más humilde y sencillo. Consiste en callar y repetir. Invitar al sueño. Imitarlo. Permanecer piadosa y vigilante. Y repetir, y repetir sin fin... (*Todos*, 1993: 207).

The repetition of certain literary topoi will turn the analysis of other works by Amat back to *Todos somos Kafka*. It would be better to affirm that rather than conditioning creativity, creativity is killed by the exercise of literature. The writer cannot think in a vacuum and, from that perspective, there is nothing new and everything has already been written. Obviously, this statement is directly related to a poetics of postmodernism. The French poet Rimbaud, also a dead author, having obtained the gift of voice through the power of narrative, talks to “la lectora”:

– [...] Rompa frases. Descontorsióñese con las palabras. ¡Qué lástima me da verla, sometida al sufrimiento de cuatro locos! Víctima de esos nombres que la ignoran y por los que usted se ha convertido en sus ecos. Repetir una y otra vez nuestros nombres como si fuéramos santos. [...] Ha perdido su vida en la vida de sus sueños. Ha cedido su tiempo a sus quimeras (*Todos*, 1993: 220-221).

Although she does agree with Rimbaud's initial recommendation of how to proceed to write, "la lectora" strongly disagrees with his victimisation of the female literary-subject regarded as a slave of male creativity. The female literary-subject has to become dynamically implicated in creativity, she has to be agent, create a text, or as Kristeva would put it, exercise *jouissance*. Dealing with literary creativity is tantamount to exploring the representational potential of literature and this rationale is enough to leave us with the sensation of a text in literary movement, a text whose existence is justified by the narration of a process that can only be finalised with death, the Barthesian death of the author maybe, or maybe another type of death. The presence of suicide in the book makes up for the reconsideration of the critical dogma of the death of the author. In fact, a very significant part of the literary quest undergone by "la lectora" in her peculiar *bildungsroman* is the quest for the suicidal male writer, the writer who dies in the text and therefore goes through a symbolic, but critically consolidated, death of the author. As *bildungsroman*, in this first-person metanovel, the narrator's quest must take the reader to an anagnorisis, to a moment of recognition in which both reader and narrator reach some kind of pristine knowledge. What is the essence of her quest, the quest textually undergone by "la lectora"? She wants precisely to find out what, as "escritora", she should or could do

with the dead writers, what to do with their influence in her text, how to understand it. And she has tried to do this by narrating, by writing a novel that is conscious of the presence of literary influence. She takes this rationale to the extreme because she needs to ascertain what her position in respect to the literary canon should be when she creates her text. Wanting to control the influence of the writers she loves leads her to explore them further. One could interpret this as a consequence of an otherwise logical craving for some authorial power. After all, this is her novel and she is writing it. Once it is finished it will belong to the reader and it will undoubtedly also be part of literature because she has needed to make use of literature to write it.

CHAPTER 2:

Viajar es muy difícil. Manual de ruta para lectores periféricos (1995):

PSYCHOANALYSING LITERATURE: A PRESCRIPTIVE LOOK

1. PSYCHOANALYSING LITERATURE:

PRESCRIBING THE PERIPHERY

He escrito una tesis doctoral dedicada a estudiar los medios de potenciar la memoria creadora natural frente a la inutilidad de seguir cultivando los mecanismos propios y más prosaicos de la memoria artificial que de forma más perfecta que la mnemotecnica humana es desarrollada por las máquinas electrónicas. En mi tesis insisto en que el escritor, por no decir el pensador en general, debe estimular las estrategias del arte del olvido que beneficiarán las cualidades creadoras personales. La máquina no puede olvidar. En eso, todavía la aventajamos (*Ladrón*, 1988: 117).

The pragmatic approach to textual genesis the words from *El ladrón de libros* exhibit prescribes the tropological importance of seeing literary creation and creativity in itself as a “viaje”, intertextual and self-reflexive. Amat’s *El ladrón de libros y otras bibliomanías* (1988) and *El libro mudo. Las aventuras del escritor entre la pluma y el ordenador* (1994) are situated between her works on librarianship and her works of fiction. In these texts she tentatively explores the influence computer technology exerts on writing and literary creation. Of particular interest is

the section entitled “Bibliografía seleccionada” (159-167) in *El libro mudo* where, in a colloquial style, sources are discussed and grouped under the following headings, some of them obviously Barthesian: “Máquinas escribientes”, “El placer del texto”, “Memorias y olvidos”, “Muerte del autor”, “Locos literarios”, “Ordenadores inteligentes”, “Oulipo y la literatura combinada” and “Libros electrónicos”. In *El ladrón de libros y otras bibliomanías*, the chapter “El escritor informatizado” (104-121), from which the opening quotation has been taken is of special interest because Amat makes reference to her own doctoral dissertation and to the role oblivion plays in the formation of a literary memory that will subsequently mould the configuration of a narrative poetics.

Even though Amat has tried to reconcile her interest in theorizing literary creation and literary theory with her librarianship skills, the influence of her profession is nowhere more felt than in *Viajar es muy difícil*, a text that can be read as a consequential construction emerging from the relationship between oblivion and artistic creation. The art of oblivion is also related, within the psychoanalytical discipline, to the formation of the unconscious. Insofar as the unconscious is regulated by mechanisms that operate in relation to repression, *Viajar es muy difícil* can be read as a narrative invention of intrahistorical literary spaces. The book offers hypothetical readings of the silences surrounding key names of the official, in the sense of canonical, history of literature. *Viajar es muy difícil* is fiction and, that being the only stable feature of this erratic text, has to ground any further analysis undertaken. “Los libros hay que vestirlos de novela, de otra forma no se leen [...]”

(*Viajar*, 1995: 82), says Italo Svevo to Fernando Pessoa in the chapter entitled “La ruta del tabaco” (*Viajar*, 1995: 80-83). And this book, although it is not a novel, is dressed as fiction.

The existence of a psychoanalytical plot has conditioned the development of *Pan de boda* and *La intimidación* in particular. However, this is not the case in *Viajar es muy difícil*, not only because this is a book without a plot but also because the book does not emphasise character development but the development of literature. There is not a main character or an omniscient narrator telling a story that has symbolic value waiting to be decoded by the reader or critic. The first part of this chapter will elaborate further on what the prescriptive approach entails in order to understand its status in Amat’s politics of representation. The text is dressed in the guise of narrative and looks prescriptively at twentieth-century literature. This type of formal structure is not different from the one exhibited in *Todos somos Kafka*. However, in *Viajar es muy difícil*, there is not a first-person narrator or an omniscient voice that gives uniformity to discourse. The literary-subject searching for unification removed in respect to *Todos somos Kafka*, the strategy of the short plot is used as subversive device to isolate instances of metaliterary importance. *Viajar es muy difícil* is situated halfway between *Todos somos Kafka* and *Letra herida* not only chronologically but also conceptually. The book offers a background against which readers such as “la lectora” can emerge. It can therefore be read retrospectively as a recreation of how “la lectora” would read nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature. She regarded herself as a dweller in a place called “locura” (*Todos*, 1993: 223), which she wanted

to embrace as a metaliterary posture. This aspect is explored in *Viajar es muy difícil*. The second section of this chapter will analyse the treatment “locura” receives in *Viajar es muy difícil*. Its relationship to literary discourse is explained further by detaching it from the subject’s voice. The literary-subject or authorial voice that produces the text is always in (literary) flight, travelling.¹ The third section of this chapter will return to a reformulated notion of the literary-subject, the peripheral reader, and will aim to clarify it further. In this way, the calm and orderly discourse of *Letra herida* will be reached. In order to move towards that point, it is necessary to comprehend what the peripheral literary-subject, as Amat seems to envisage it, has had to transcend and/ or become subordinated to in order to negotiate a literary position and emerge as metaliterary authorial voice that can afford to write a text.

The title *Viajar es muy difícil. Manual de ruta para lectores periféricos* (1995) contains a categoric statement that, affirming the hypothetical complexity involved in travelling, justifies the descriptive subtitle that follows and delineates, at the same time, the type of reader the book is addressed to: the peripheral reader. The applicability of the notion of periphery cannot be overstated. It bears resonances of Spivak’s subaltern, Freud’s uncanny, Kristeva’s abject, Foucault’s views on the hidden influence of power on the emergence of culture and on the subject and, finally, on Amat’s critical usage of madness and a narrative destabilisation of generic

¹ The third chapter of Part I, “*Letra herida* (1998): Rendering the Archaeology of the Authorial Self”, will develop this idea further. *Viajar es muy difícil* narrates what frames the literary-subject. *Letra herida* deals with subjectivity and authorship. Since it is not possible to fix clear ideas on subjectivity because this text does not offer them, the third part of the present chapter will deal with the notion of the subject in flight, thus isolating views that can be read as precursors of the ones expanded in the 1998 text.

structures for the understanding of literary-subjectivity and textual genesis. Madness, for her, emerges between centre and periphery and, in spite of all their differences or precisely because of them, these theoretical approaches prescribe different ways of reading and interpreting culture from the periphery.

Peripheral readers people the book and maybe this is the most highly self-reflexive feature of the text for it brings together authorial and narrative voice, characters and readers. All are engaged in de-centering, the reader by reading and understanding the text, the author by writing fiction about the canon, and the canonical figures by being imagined. The peripheral readers within this book are writers reading each other and talking to each other. They do not belong to the canon yet and they do not necessarily yearn for the centre, not realising that, by definition, they are, as it were, always still in the margins which ultimately can be regarded as the natural space of creation and observance of the centre, the canon. Reading the canon in a counter-hegemonic way is what the reader does with *Viajar es muy difícil* and, as Bell Hooks suggests in her *Yearning: race, gender & cultural politics*, only counter-hegemonic reading can identify “the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision” (1991: 145). In this case, this space is within the centre and the margin, both are present. The book revises the canon but, through fiction, places dead authors in the periphery. As characters, they are not the centre yet, they do not belong to the canon because, in this fiction, they have not experienced the death of the author yet. As characters, all of the dead authors appearing –Joyce, Svevo, Bowles, Cavafy, George Eliot, etc.– do yearn for literature and therefore struggle for the text. In the

same way Bell Hooks uses the word “yearning” to describe the textual pulse of her writings on race, gender and cultural politics, the difficulty of the mental movement of Amat’s intertextual, self-reflexive and metaliterary “viaje” will expose sites in which gender, race and culture can be problematised. The radical possibility of resignification critics such as Bell Hooks, Kosofsky Sedgwick or Judith Butler have put forward is present also in Amat’s texts but it is in *Viajar es muy difícil* where this potentiality appears to be yearned for by a voice not too distant from the narrators of *La intimidación* and *El país del alma*.

Defining what a peripheral reader might be is tantamount to mapping and travelling through the periphery, what is not the centre, of a space called literature. The stories contained in the book can be understood as directions or instructions that lead the way to a reformulation of literary territory momentarily fixing recognizable, canonical authors against a background not composed by literary movements, styles or widely discussed influences. The linear narration of literary history as a sequence of centuries, tendencies, generations and movements is thus challenged and another version of twentieth-century relevant literary names prescribed, not by custom or by the establishment, but by fiction and narrative strategy, or rather, stratagem, because ultimately, *Viajar es muy difícil* is an act of narrative invention.² And it is more than intertextual. Intertextuality is just one of the narrative strands that hold the text together. Literary self-reflexivity is another.

² Nuria Amat admits that all the stories told in *Viajar es muy difícil* are invented although she considers they could have been true.

Viajar es muy difícil places the intertext in a literary context and, in this way, the book turns intertextuality into a hypothetical or occasional narrative practice. Self-consciousness –an anthropomorphic concept– and self-reflexivity –a textual concept– can be discussed by the same underlying principle: as representational practices subjected to an intentionality. *Viajar es muy difícil* does not have a single unitary plot in the same way that *El ladrón de libros y otras bibliomanías* (1988), *Amor breve* (1990), *Monstruos* (1991 [1990]), and *Letra herida* (1998) do not have one either.³ All these texts engage in a mimetic relationship with literary substance and this mimesis, self-reflexive and intertextual, inaugurates the metaliterary dimension of this text. As was the case with *Todos somos Kafka*, the presence of self-reflexivity and intertextuality are dependent on the metaliterary discourse the text conforms. However, the results are different. It can be stated that reading *Viajar es muy difícil* is tantamount to provisionally engaging with the reading that it was possible to perceive lurking behind, self-reflexively, and around, intertextually, the figure of “la lectora” in *Todos somos Kafka*.

In *Todos somos Kafka*, “la lectora” wrote moved by her status of female reader of the male dominated canon and also moved by the nostalgia caused by the death of the author, i.e., for her, the death of the literary father. In *Viajar es muy difícil*, however, it is the narrative of the biography of literature, as it were, which

³ The connections that hold the sections of chapters that form all these texts, including the collection of short-stories *Amor breve* (1990) has to be circumscribed within the postmodern trend of challenging narrative formal or generic stability. In Hispanic studies and in relation to the proliferation of short stories, the possibility of exploring literary issues within this frame has been studied by Montserrat Lunati in the extensive prologue of her anthology *Rainy Days/Días de lluvia: Short Stories by Contemporary Spanish Women Writers* (1997). For further reference, see Valls (1991) and Alonso (1991).

assembles the text and gives continuity to the stories: the text is not assembled by the third-person voice but by what might be defined as *emplotment*. Stating that *Viajar es muy difícil* can be read as a narrative of the biographical dimension of twentieth-century literary evolution makes the text metaliterary. Intertextuality and self-reflexivity hold the different sequential instances of plot the book contains. Understanding the former as a “defining component of textuality itself” (Brownlow & Kronik 1998: 12) and a component certainly subjected to nonlinear dynamics results in an expansion of the critical possibilities of the latter. *Emplotment* is what makes intertextuality a fully and openly operative component in the text.

In the same way that parallelisms have been established between first-person narration, autobiographical narration and psychoanalytical therapy, it is possible to regard *Viajar es muy difícil* as a psychoanalytical narration of literature. From this point of view, the image Amat’s text offers of literary substance is, rather than descriptive, prescriptive, like that of the therapist. Can literature be psychoanalysed? And if so, what would be the result of this type of analytical approach? A literary piece can be read using psychoanalytic criticism as an interpretative tool but only the mind can be psychoanalysed and a psychoanalytical reading of a character’s development carried out if the text lends itself to it. Bluntly stating that literature can be psychoanalysed would be incurring an anthropomorphization of textual genesis, one of the faults of which intertextuality has been accused. The notion of intertextuality as a dialogue between texts has been repeatedly disfavoured by critics (e.g. Pérez Firmat 1990, Begley 1994) because “it commits the sin of

anthropomorphizing the text” (Brownlow & Kronik 1998: 11). Intertextuality is not dialogical, linear or relational:

In fact, the metaphorical maneuver that relates intertextual activity to dialogue [...] is not now, and probably never was, entirely appropriate. The analogy reflects an early attempt to distinguish intertextuality from the study of sources and influences that Julia Kristeva, persuaded by the gospel according to Mikhail Bakhtin, set out to discredit. What has been more recently perceived as intertextuality’s nonlinear dynamics diminishes the dialogical metaphor’s usefulness and allies it more nearly with today’s computational models of the mind, which, as Sherry Turkle points out, “often embrace a postmodern aesthetic of complexity and decentering” (Turkle 1996, 149) (1998: 11-12).

Viajar es muy difícil traces literary effects back to their origins, and fiction, not theory nor a historical account, is created in order to do so. Psychoanalytical therapy also traces effects back to their origins and it is this representational agenda that has allowed critical parallelisms to be drawn between first-person fiction and the psychoanalytical novel.⁴ *Viajar es muy difícil* demonstrates that the critical interest for psychoanalytical processes transposed to the realm of fiction can exceed the sphere of characterisation and reach a metaliterary level rather than a purely metafictional one, as is the case, according to Ciplijauskaitė, with Spanish novelists that have adopted a psychoanalytical perspective to construct characters and texts (1994 [1988]: 118). *Viajar es muy difícil* is not first-person fiction but the voice that travels metaliterarily, prescribes a reading and is as partial as any first-person narrative voice can be.

⁴ Examples of this abound: Ballesteros (1994), Ciplijauskaitė (1994 [1988]), Frye (1989).

Building her argument on the prescriptive nature of certain forms of modern metafiction, Hutcheon, in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, defines modern metafiction as “a mimesis of process” (1984 [1980]: 5). This mimesis grows out of an “interest in consciousness as well as the objects of consciousness that constitutes the ‘psychological realism’ of Woolf, Gide, Svevo, and Proust at the beginning of the century” (1984 [1980]: 5). Waugh states that nearly all contemporary experimental writing reveals some explicitly metafictional strategies. Furthermore,

any text that draws the reader’s attention to its process of construction by frustrating his or her conventional expectations of meaning and closure problematizes more or less explicitly the ways in which narrative codes –whether ‘literary’ or ‘social’– artificially construct apparently ‘real’ and imaginary worlds in the terms of particular ideologies while presenting these as transparently ‘natural’ and ‘eternal’ (1984 [1980]: 22).

The views of these two narratologists could be transposed to a more psychoanalytical perspective. *Viajar es muy difícil* is a mimesis of literary progression that draws the reader’s attention to the construction of literary tissue, problematizes codes and constructs an apparent literary reality. The text tries to render authors in a psychologically realistic way and, interestingly enough, Svevo and Proust are among the writers fictionalised. Literature cannot be analysed but a psychoanalytical reading of what that abstraction called literature might or might not be or have been, can be undertaken. Consequently, time and space have no importance in the journey.

The first part of the book (13-72) unveils a world made of literary cities in which writers live to write and write to live. It is a world that slips away along with the image of the writer who has opted for narrating the personal. Kafka's Prague, Pessoa's Lisbon, Kavafis' and Durrell's Alexandria, Borges's Buenos Aires, Joyce's Trieste, are, among others, the landmarks of the route drawn in this handout for peripheral readers. No one will ever know what they were like, how these cities were seen by the eyes of the writer basing literature on them. But the writer in the city can be constructed and the activity of writing contextualised against a city, an epoch, a way of living. As Ana María Moix pertinently points out, these are cities

sin las que seguramente no existirían las obras capitales de la literatura del siglo XX. A modo de guía para lectores infelices, Nuria Amat establece una geografía de ciudades literarias ya inexistentes, muertas [...], de las que nos refiere, no los conjuntos artísticos-culturales destinados a la contemplación del imposible turista o viajero de paso, sino los elementos (cafés, adoquinados, farolas, manicomios, tranvías) que configuran el paisaje espiritual y mental de los grandes escritores de nuestra época (*Diario 16*, 18/11/1995).

The mental and spiritual landscape of the writers is the landscape of memory. It exceeds the author and, in doing so through a literary text, an act of invention, prescribes literature. In the geography of memory, the locality of cities equals that of other spaces, such as closets and attics. Any place is an abstraction of something that is real. The second part of the book (75-130), less analytic but more imaginative than the first part, narrates encounters between writers. Finally, the third part (133-171) denounces in the form of a diary written by "una periodista desolada" (135) the destruction, caused by war, of another literary city: Sarajevo. In the epilogue that

closes the text, the author uses the concept of difference to justify the text: “[...] los escritores, como los negros, las mujeres, los bosnios, los judíos... persistimos en luchar por la diferencia” (*Viajar*, 1995: 173). This struggle for difference, a key feminist issue since the eighties, operates at several levels in Amat’s politics of representation as an instigation of literature.⁵ Narrating the difference is always a challenge to expectations of gender or genre, both concepts that support politics of representation. In the case of *Viajar es muy difícil*, it can be claimed that in the same way that theories based on difference have opposed essentialist views, this text theorizes literature as differential in the sense of positional, and constituted in language, therefore challenging historical preconception of literature the peripheral reader might or might not have. The so-called feminism of difference descends from and has co-existed with feminism of equality, both having a somewhat antagonistic relationship. A precursor of gender studies, feminism of difference moved not only beyond negative difference but also beyond a principle of identity per se. Exploiting the concept of difference led to key critical evolution within feminism. Additionally, the points of contact between contemporary feminism and queer studies very much revolve around the struggle for difference understood as a struggle for representation. These are key aspects of Amat’s novels. Characterisation and the manifestation of difference always go together as far as the protagonists she creates are concerned.

⁵ For further information on the critical impact of the concept of difference and, in particular, its influence on feminism and psychoanalysis see:

- Barrett, Michèle (1987): “The concept of ‘difference’” in *Feminist Review*, 26, 29-41.
- Braidotti, Rosi: “The politics of ontological difference” in Brennan, Teresa (ed.) (1989): *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 88-105.
- Irigaray, Luce (1984): *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*. Paris: Minuit.
- Subirats, Marina (1998): *Con diferencia*. Barcelona: Icaria.

The consequences of this will be analysed in Part II and points of contact between Amat's narrative and gender criticism and queer studies ascertained. By narrating instances of literary history outside their linear frame and inserting them into instances of plot any claim of anthropomorphisation is reversed. However, it has to be remembered that the book explores the human component of literary history, apart from the textuality of literature understood not only as what literary establishment has turned out to be but also as to what it might have turned out to be but did not. If *Todos somos Kafka* could be regarded as a text on its way to the isolation of metaliterature, *Viajar es muy difícil*, goes a step further by giving coherence to the acts of silence and repetition "la lectora" identified as essential to her role of metaliterary narrator.

2. A MUCH FREQUENTED STOP IN LITERARY JOURNEYS:

THE PLACE OF MADNESS

Knowledge, after all, is not itself power, although it is the magnetic field of power. Ignorance and opacity collude or compete with knowledge in mobilising the flows of energy, desire, goods, meanings, persons (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1990: 4).

The fact that madness has become a *common* discursive *place* is not the least of its paradoxes. Madness usually occupies a position of *exclusion*; it is the *outside* of a culture. But madness that is a *common* place occupies a position of *inclusion* and becomes the *inside* of a culture.

It is perhaps precisely this which marks the specificity of “madness” in our time, as what can designate at once the outside and the inside: the inside, paradoxically, to the extent that it is supposed to “be” the outside. To say that madness has indeed become our commonplace is thus to say that madness in the contemporary world points to the radical ambiguity of the inside and the outside, insofar as this ambiguity escapes the speaking subjects (who speak only to have it escape them) (Felman 1985: 12).

In spite of the use of biographical data and in spite of the psychoanalytical references her work displays, Kosofsky does not write about madness: her focus is, and there is no reason why it should not be, elsewhere. Nevertheless, through research, she, like other contemporary feminist, gender and/or queer theorists, knows certainly more and better about the general qualities of the signs of insanity most of us intuitively just understand.⁶ However, like Amat, Kosofsky thoroughly sorts out her theoretical contribution from historical, sociological and literary information with

⁶ Of particular interest from Kosofsky's *Epistemology of the Closet* are the sections entitled “Knowledge/ Ignorance; Natural/ Unnatural”, “Cognition/Paranoia; Secrecy/Disclosure” and “Health/ Illness” from “Some Binarisms (I)” (1990: 91-130) and also “Abstraction/ Figuration” and again “Health/ Illness” from “Some Binarisms (II)” (1990: 131-181). See also *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (de Lauretis 1994).

flows and fluxes, therefore elaborating on ideas such as the flow of meaning, the flux of bohemia. Her epistemological involvement can be indeed regarded as a flow that surges between unconscious and conscious elements of texts. Felman, on the contrary, does write about madness. Her *Writing & Madness* (1985) offers an exhaustive account of the relationship between madness and literary knowledge. In her *Reading & Sexual Difference*, she isolates the importance of reading and of creating a bond with the activity in order to question the canon and argues that women might only be able to access or “engender” their own story indirectly “by conjugating literature, theory and autobiography together through the act of reading and by reading, thus, into the texts of culture” (1993: 14). Her discursive route through literature and literary criticism takes place via the relationship between literature and mental illness. In the light of this relationship, she ends the journey isolating a construction of the subject.⁷ She ends up in self-reflexivity by examining the self-reflexive nature of texts that put in question the categories forming them. This is revealed as a key feature that can help to ascertain the influential presence of madness in textual genesis. The subject and the theme of madness become repeatedly present to each other in many instances of Amat’s works but there is certainly more than a synonymous, symmetrical relationship established between them. Hegel placed madness inside thought and Nietzsche placed thought inside madness. Felman (1985) reminds us that these are not the only two philosophers that have dealt with

⁷ This has also been done by Butler, Kosofsky and other feminists. The notion of subject is, as will be discussed in the third section of the present chapter, the link between Amat’s narrative and her critical writings. The need for a critical analysis of the subject regarded as producer of cultural texts will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to *Letra herida*.

madness and the production of thought as inextricably bound in discourse. Pascal, Rousseau, Derrida and Foucault are among the names she mentions in her textual itinerary.

Knowledge about madness can be produced somewhere other than within and through the psychoanalytical discipline. It can be produced through and within literary discourse. Self-reflexivity in *Viajar es muy difícil* moves beyond the text itself and is extrapolated to literature in general, literature as an abstraction of the corpus the literary canon is. And in this abstraction, the discourse of madness is present and absent. The interplay between presence and absence is representational and operates between on the one hand, the centre or what is canonically known and, on the other hand, the margins, what has been peripheral and therefore absent from representation. The fictionalisation of Jane Bowles and Lucia Joyce has to be understood as part of this interplay. Amat fictionalises operations of restriction on women's discourse through the figures of Lucia Joyce and Jane Bowles and uses them to narrate woman in relation to male author as a passport from the margin to the centre, from being a writer to becoming an author. A meaningful link can be established with *Todos somos Kafka* where "la lectora" writes that

una niña puede no ser nada cuando observa a un escritor escribiendo detrás de la puerta, pero la misma niña deja rastros de su paso en el orden neurótico de las cosas personales de un escritor adulto (*Todos*, 1993: 29).

This “orden neurótico” opposes a more traditional order which hides discourses and signification such as the one of “locura”. Moix comments appositely that the book *Viajar es muy difícil*

[...] nos induce a ver en él un secreto acuerdo con la naturaleza del ser de lo literario y, por tanto, nos arrastra a preguntarnos si lo realmente extravagante no será seguir contando historias según el orden argumental tradicional (*Diario 16*, 18/11/1995).

For Moix, what the book narrates is “el sistema nervioso de un ser vivo llamado literatura”. The information transmitted by the book has an effect similar to a sensation diffused by the connection of nerves. In this way, the “orden neurótico de las cosas personales de un escritor adulto” (*Todos*, 1993: 29) whose importance “la lectora” isolates, could be presented in a discourse that would be similar to the one of *Viajar es muy difícil*. It is not a coincidence that madness has a place in the continuum of the nervous system the book is supposed to form. However, if “locura” has such a place, then something remains to be said about how “locura” reaches signification and how it accesses representation.

Madness and philosophy seem to meet in literature, the only representative practice in which delirium and thought can co-exist, merge and be textually represented. On this aspect, Derrida and Foucault would agree and the same line of argument can be traced in the approach of both Amat and Felman. Both writers are rethinking the specificity of literature. The treatment “locura” receives in *Viajar es muy difícil* firstly clarifies the characterisation of Amat’s female narrators and secondly proves that madness can produce a discourse that understands madness.

Felman convincingly specifies the need for such a discourse and also ontologically locates the discourse itself in the domain of literary creation, the same place where Amat locates it:

[...] Do we really know what *talking about madness* means? Do we really understand the significance of writing *about* madness (as opposed to writing madness)? Since there is no metalanguage, could it not be that writing madness and writing *about* it, speaking madness and speaking *of* it, would eventually converge – somewhere where they least expect to meet. And might it not be at that meeting place that one could situate, precisely, *writing*? (Felman 1985: 14).

Felman isolates the need for a metalanguage that expresses madness, for the main characteristic of madness is the lack of language, “an absence of production”(1985: 14). For her, literary discourse can be the language of madness, its metalanguage. In this way, both madness and literature have become political and the relationship between these two politics is explored in *Viajar es muy difícil*. The location of the authentic voice of madness permeates the metaliterary quests of the female narrators of *Todos somos Kafka* and *La intimidación* but it is in *Viajar es muy difícil* where the turn to literature in search for momentary fixations that delimit the influential presence of madness occurs.

How does Amat reach the signifier “locura” in *Viajar es muy difícil*? In the midst of the emplotment chain of *Viajar es muy difícil*, there are three chapters that, when read jointly, momentarily settle madness and delineate its influence on processes of literary creation. These are: “Una Europa en miniatura” (84-89), “Viaje a la locura” (89-95) and “Vista panorámica de los manicomios europeos” (95-106).

Although it cannot be forgotten that none of these episodes is true, there is no apparent reason why they could not have happened. As J. M. Fernández Vázquez (1996) points out in his article appropriately entitled “El viaje imposible y verdadero”:

el viaje interior que propone la autora [...] define la ciudad literaria, aquella porción de espacio, pero también de tiempo, donde un escritor establece un vínculo de amor y de odio que se reflejará en el peregrinar de los lectores-viajeros (*Diario 16, Culturas*, 9/3/1996).

As part of this inner journey, the text reaches the place of madness. The reading on madness is, as will be discussed, gendered. “Una Europa en miniatura” (84-89) is a key passage to its exploration. There, James Joyce appears characterised as Italo Svevo’s English tutor in Trieste, the town where the Irish novelist lived prior to the Second World War. In terms of their literary activity, both writers are presented in their literary beginnings:

Mr. Joyce, por su parte, es también un escritor incipiente que, sin embargo, ha publicado un par de libros. No ha sido ésa la suerte del empresario Schmitz. Olvidó la juventud en una de sus fábricas. Y está condenado a ser un escritor secreto. Un escritor que lleva una doble vida. Lo cual no deja de ser interesante. En Svevo todo es múltiple, dispar, contradictorio, distinto. Para empezar, la elección del seudónimo: mitad alemán, mitad italiano (*Viajar*, 1995: 84).

Relating secrecy, and therefore silence, to the act of writing is an idea incessantly fictionalised by Amat. The female narrative voice of *El país del alma* writes verses that are never meant to be read. The female narrator of *La intimidad* is a secret writer of unreadable texts, and her father is portrayed as a frustrated writer, a writer without

a book. Svevo and Joyce, having been turned into characters, consequently emerge as writers in the process of becoming authors. They are still alive, they do not have an oeuvre, they are not who the reader thinks they are. When Joyce leaves Svevo, the chapter finishes. Svevo gets out of the text and slides into a textual silence that he has chosen. He hides from Joyce when Joyce has read his novel and has started seeing him as a writer. Svevo had given Joyce a copy of his manuscript *Conscienza di Zeno* (1930) but he will never hear the words of praise Joyce would have liked to address to him. Svevo's fear of writing gets him out of the text. He now belongs to textual silence. The difference with Joyce is that Joyce's writing is synonymous with his literary-subjectivity and he cannot forfeit it because it is his being and not a prospective act of becoming. Joyce then leaves Svevo's house as the reader leaves Svevo's chapter and slides into a "viaje a la locura".

The next chapter, logically entitled "Viaje a la locura" (89-95), turns Joyce into a monster and his daughter Lucia into a victim of himself and of his writing.⁸ "Viaje a la locura" and "Vista panorámica de los manicomios europeos" (95-106) are linked by a fictive character who reads literature from the periphery, the psychiatrist Achille Delmas, "especialista en escritoras locas" (*Viajar*, 1995: 97). This character offers a reading of the lives of Lucia Joyce, the writer Jane Bowles and marginally also the life of the painter Leonora Carrington whose case he narrates in a letter to Paul Bowles. Delmas places himself between female madness and male literary

⁸ In *Monstruos*, Amat deals with myths such as Don Juan, Narcissus, Carmen, Judith, Edipo, Sheherezade, Job, Adonis or Noah. In her interpretation and reconstruction of these subjects, she turns them into monsters by narrating what is pathological in them. Their psychic incoherence is turned into coherent discourse. It is another "viaje a la locura" and one that leaves the reader with the sensation of its novelistic potential.

activity and he makes James Joyce and Paul Bowles speak about the madness of his daughter, in the case of Joyce, and wife, in the case of Bowles. Delmas understands the madness of his female patients that write as a frustrated need to express thought in words. In *Letra herida* (1998) Amat aphoristically writes “[...] el loco, dicen, es una escritura sin obra” (*Letra*, 1998: 13). This Foucauldian pronouncement relates madness and literature and coincides not only with the portrait of “la lectora”, but also with the portrait of Lucia Joyce and Jane Bowles undertaken in *Viajar es muy difícil*, or rather, coincides with the way Delmas interprets the neurosis of both women:

[...] las dos mujeres habían vivido con escritores exiliados, y [...] ambas terminaban recluidas en instituciones psiquiátricas. Las dos mujeres sufrían problemas parecidos de desorganización del habla e incluso los gestos y ademanes de Lucia Joyce, que parecían carentes de una dirección definida, se repetían, más suavemente, en la escritora americana. Era evidente que tales ademanes extraños expresaban la imposibilidad de encontrar entendimiento en sus fluctuaciones mentales internas (*Viajar*, 1995: 96).

Delmas’s way of addressing James Joyce and Paul Bowles in order to discuss the pathologies of the two women is an explicit appeal to their understanding of the authorial power literary discourse makes individuals experience at least momentarily. Consequently, at least momentarily, Lucia and Jane should be able to feel they can have “obra”. In this way, he tells the two authors that the result of the treatment should be the presence of writing in the lives of Jane and Lucia. It must be themselves, the two women, who, through therapy and care, find “entendimiento” for their “fluctuaciones mentales internas” (*Viajar*, 1995: 96). Implicitly, there is a

critique of the authors' usage of power within their gendered roles of father of Lucia and husband of Jane. These roles keep the two women subjected because it is as father and husband that they decide to keep them in asylums. Neither James nor Paul will acknowledge that it is the fear of the women's word that impels them to keep them apart. They feel their potential depends on them and this is too heavy a burden. Had they chosen to bear it, the possibility or impossibility of the women's textual production would have overshadowed theirs.

The interaction between therapist, patients and authors destabilises formed ideas of madness and therefore erases its pathological limits and definitions. Lucia's madness and Jane's madness are part of a literary chain. Their respective madness exists in relation to their textual silence and to the textual production of James Joyce and Paul Bowles. Having already stated that Amat's most relevant characters and narrators are defined by their literary activity, by the influence writing or reading has had in the configuration of their characters, *Viajar es muy difícil* emerges as another turn of the screw within this politics of representation. And this produces an uncanny effect with regard to the perception of literary history, because it reveals traits that could well be interpreted as unconscious elements of a text.

MacLennan's analysis of the relationship between writing and mental illness is more historical than literary. He provides a very concise, and also quite Foucauldian, diachronic synthesis of the evolution of madness:

A process of interiorisation unfolds in the religious sphere before being eventually integrated into a secular and psychological one. Spiritualised or religiously inspired conceptions of interiority are gradually transformed: by the end of the eighteenth

century they become Romantic or idealistic conceptions of the subjective self –for example, Kant’s autonomous subject, which Adorno sought to demystify by identifying it critically in terms of the bourgeois milieu. This process is relevant to the experience of madness as mediated in subjective writings. A gradual interiorisation of madness, occurring between the medieval and modern periods, accelerates after 1640, culminating between 1750 and 1850 in a creative writing of madness (1992: 9).

What his discourse communicates is an outline of the historical itinerary that maps his own journey and exploration of the concept of madness and its route to literature. Amat does something similar, but restricted to the twentieth century and giving relevance to the influence of madness of female writers. This has also been done by critics such as Showalter (1987), Felman (1995), Wood (1994), Caramagno (1992), Simms (1992) and Claridge (1990) who have mainly explored female-authored autobiographical forms of writing created by women who have been institutionalised at some point in their lives. None of these critics are psychoanalysts but they do try to examine in what way literature and madness are informed by each other. By emplotting this underlying principle, Amat places both literature and madness in the process of “informing us each *about* the other” (Felman 1985: 16). An advance could be made on McLennan’s outline. These critics ignore the negative connotation of the signifier madness and coincide in isolating the mediatory relevance of madness or various forms of psychological pathologies in subjective writing. The discourse of gender theory and queer theory, insofar as it very often exhibits a problematisation of subjective identity, deals with issues related to what might be perceived as madness. The erasure of the signifier of madness is understandable and totally legitimate

but, the opposite, its literary and critical usage, is legitimate too. And aligning the two approaches turns out to be necessary as regards the analysis of Amat's texts.

Within the text of *Viajar es muy difícil* madness is denied inasmuch as it is written and within this movement genderisation plays a part. In Lucia Joyce's case, Delmas appeals to her feminisation to explain to Joyce his daughter's schizophrenia.

In this way, he explains to Joyce that

Entonces [cuando Lucia empezó a hablar en varios idiomas al mismo tiempo] habría sido el momento de estimular en ella su afición por la escritura, encontrar un soporte donde fijar el semejante idiomático. Por el contrario, se favoreció su vocación danzarina, su permanencia en la intangibilidad, su identificación con lo etéreo, en suma, su viaje a la huida definitiva. Y mientras Lucia bailaba y enloquecía, el padre-escritor aprovechaba la situación para tomar notas del lenguaje universal que luego, en su soledad de escritor, ampliaba y confundía. En realidad el padre escribía la novela de la enfermedad de Lucia, copiaba las voces desordenadas de su hija y ésta aumentaba su capacidad para el disparate con el fin de complacer a su padre, de formar parte de la obra de su padre (*Viajar*, 1995: 93-94).

Lucia's "viaje a la huida definitiva" can be interpreted as the definite interiorisation of madness. Her social emergence as a mad woman was completed. She was considered mad. Although madness can be projected in discourse, hers never would be. As a consequence, madness becomes real. She is portrayed as mad because she does not have a text and, again, "el loco, dicen, es una escritura sin obra" (*Letra*, 1998: 13).

Madness can become writing and writing can reflect something close to what is socially and scientifically regarded as madness. The idea put forward through and by Delmas's portrait of Jane and Lucia is that when writing remains in the text, the individual becomes mentally and therefore socially safe. The position of the literary-

subject and the content of texts created can coincide, the theme of madness and the subject become present to each other in literature in general, and narrative in particular. This is more than a synonymous or symmetrical relationship. Feminism has equated the personal and the political repeatedly. Through the equation between the personal and the political a reformulation of the literary is produced in *Viajar es muy difícil*. In this respect, Ana Rodríguez-Fischer convincingly alleges that

Apoyada en una amplia documentación, Nuria Amat no se detiene en el trazado exterior del viaje, y se adentra en modalidades abismales: el viaje al fondo de la noche, el viaje a la locura, los manicomios desde donde se ha escrito buena parte de la literatura moderna (*El Norte de Castilla*, 22/7/1995).

In Amat's works, issues relating to the personal are dealt with by narrating the influence on literature of institutionalised madness, states of melancholia, AIDS or physical torture, and also of places loaded with high symbolic potential, such as closets, attics, towers, war shelters; in a nutshell, various forms of what she terms "La Casa de Atrás" (57-70) because "el siglo XX es el siglo de los escritores perseguidos que han vivido lo suficiente como para dar fe de la memoria trágica" (*Viajar*, 1995: 59). This "dar fe de la memoria trágica" can be considered to be the unifying thread of all the stories of the book. Literary memory becomes an object of concern in the text. As was seen in the previous section, it was the main theme of Amat's doctoral dissertation. Additionally, the anagnorisis of "la lectora" revealed silence and repetition as the active dynamics the literary-subject has to perform in order to be. *Viajar es muy difícil* accomplishes the exploitation of the loci of meaning

that construct Amat's own literary grammar, a grammar she will consume for fictional purposes in other texts and also the grammar of the subjects she creates. Making the itinerary of the "viaje" linger in the discursive space of madness has led the discourse of this section to the tragic memory of the twentieth-century writer. Furthermore, discourse has not been taken out of the periphery: the text is ending in "La Casa de Atrás", a meaningful space, away from the centre, for the female writer and the writer in exile, all writers yearning for textual representation. Like the psychiatrist Delmas, Felman concludes that the key lies in writing, in the exposure of the sites and factors that surround the creation of a text. The presence of madness is something Amat is keen to represent in the text, given the importance she gives to the figure of the writer as a "persona enajenada". Particularly in the case of female writers, these are subjects normally deprived from agency, as Felman and others state. What Amat has achieved in the sections of *Viajar es muy difícil* that deal with "locura" is, instead of giving agency to them, to narrate how their lack of agency occurs.

3. THE PERIPHERAL READER: A SUBJECT IN FLIGHT OR

THE READER OF THE ABJECT?

Las ciudades literarias guardan en común un extrañamiento patriótico. [...] Los escritores de este siglo son como estas ciudades perdidas, atlántidas desaparecidas cuyos restos son estos escritores que flotan a la deriva. Escritores exiliados. Bien por elección o por desesperación: unos admirables bastardos (*Viajar*, 1995: 57).

In any established system of representation it is possible to locate ambiguity. In the case of mental representations, ambiguity is bound to be greater. The textual discourse of *Viajar es muy difícil* gives literary voice to suppressed sites of established literary memory. In this way, the narrative of a concrete self imposes no restraint on the elaboration of a discourse that tests metaliterature to the extreme by narrating what could be regarded as the unconscious elements that surrounded or could have surrounded the emergence of what has remained as known facts and characters of the historical narrative of literary evolution. The “extrañamiento patriótico” that characterises the literary city turns its inhabitants into peripheral readers, literary-subjects living a perpetual exile. This perpetual flight of the mind is peripheral because it is silent. The notion of silence has to be understood in this context as an absence from representation. If the fiction of literature which *Viajar es*

muy difícil presents is read as legal,⁹ i.e. with as much validity as supposedly official information, it is necessary to give it a place in the continuum literary identity is supposed to be. Stating that *Viajar es muy difícil* narrates the sphere of representation against which the subject is represented is not enough. On the other hand, affirming that it narrates it anew demands further explanation. Kristeva's politics of abjection can be used to illustrate what there is prior to the advent of the literary-subject insofar as it establishes contacts between representation in the Real and in the Imaginary and also between the subject and what has to disappear, in psychoanalytical terms, be repressed, for the subject to emerge. By fictionalising silent spaces of literary history, parts that can be regarded as abjected are revealed. Once this has been done, one question remains to be answered: what happens once the subject returns in the form of the peripheral reader?

As is the case with *Todos somos Kafka*, a very explicit level of intertextuality is encountered in *Viajar es muy difícil*, a level that actually supersedes the text itself, the textuality of literature, and inaugurates literary self-reflection. However, as opposed to *Todos somos Kafka*, in *Viajar es muy difícil* there is not a process of literary-subjectivity being narrated and momentarily fixed within a text and in relation to other subjects, authors, who can be considered to be historically represented in the literary canon. In *Todos somos Kafka*, the process of

⁹ In this context, the term legal refers back to Foucault's usage of the concept of the law as hegemonical discourse that perpetuates and settles established representations. According to Judith Butler (1997), resistance and, most importantly, resignification politically occur when the subject internalises its vulnerable status and uses it to challenge the apparent stability of the sphere of representation that has granted subjectivity thus asserting the legality of its discourse. See "Between Freud and Foucault" (Butler 1997: 83-105). In *Viajar es muy difícil*, the representation of the literary canon is revealed as political through the discursive reformulation of its appearance.

subjectivisation undergone by “la lectora” was characterised by her constant avoidance of prescription. She did not want or could not prescribe norms for herself, for the self her character represents, because that would be foreclosing and therefore consolidating authority and authorial power. The alternative use of first and third person could thus be considered to aid her own exploration of how to represent women and their image in literature, understanding literature as sphere of representation against which the self is depicted. The notion of the subject in flight can be assimilated to the exhaustive analysis of the subject and of theories of subject construction taken up and subverted in order to ascertain the influence of gender in the configuration of identity, or rather, of the psychoanalytical category called self.

It can be stated that *Viajar es muy difícil* is a text detached from subjectivity and focused on subjectivisation, but on the subjectivisation of who were the others in *Todos somos Kafka*. There is no fiction of the subject but there are subjects momentarily fixed in fiction. This is the narration without “la lectora” narrating but, at the same time, she is somehow present: the interpretation of the literary world the book puts forward resembles hers, resembles her reading of literature. The book can be considered a narrative process, without a process of subject construction that would reflect the usage of literature defining the narrator of *Todos somos Kafka*, *La intimidación* and also *El país del alma*.

The female literary-subject is also a subject in flight, like the ones narrated here.¹⁰ The female writers that inhabit the space of “La Casa de Atrás” constitute

¹⁰ Female subjectivity and authorship will be the focus of the third section of Chapter 3, entitled “Between Gender and Genre: A Momentary Fixation for the Female Literary-Subject”.

“una secta secreta de pequeñas escritoras asediadas por el crimen, la locura y la guerra” (*Viajar*, 1995: 59). Their smallness has to be understood by their marginality and canonical absence. Madness, crime and war rest in the interstices of the memory of Amat’s characters. These are ideas in transference that condition the emergence of the subject and Amat’s notion of “turismo de guerra” (*Viajar*, 1995: 133), a type of mental journey narrated in the “Diario de guerra de una periodista desolada” (*Viajar*, 1995: 135-155), dating from 1992 to 1993. The worst consequences of the war in the former Yugoslavia are, for the “periodista desolada”, the destruction of the library in Sarajevo and the subsequent loss of cultural memory, consequences no one seems to be heeding. She becomes one of those “pequeñas escritoras” and conjugating crime, madness and war, writes and interprets literature, from her created “Casa de Atrás”:

Primo Levi se suicidó a los pocos días de escribir su testamento: “Puesto que existe Auschwitz, es imposible que Dios exista. No encuentro la solución a este dilema. La busco pero no la encuentro.”

Las buenas citas, como los buenos libros, permiten múltiples versiones de las mismas. Yo hago la mía y la escribo en forma de grafito en la pared del vestíbulo. En este caso ha bastado con cambiar Auschwitz por Sarajevo. Mi marido, católico practicante, no podrá pasarlo por alto. [...]

“Estás loca, completamente loca. Has perdido la cabeza.” Es la frase que escucho dos veces de cada tres en boca de mi sensato esposo. Me pregunto cómo se sentiría él si se encontrara aislado en el cerco delirante de Sarajevo.[...]

Me digo que la única manera de que los 380.000 habitantes de Sarajevo tienen de resistir el cerco criminal es estando locos. Locos y felices como un manicomio donde sobreviven los desheredados de Europa. Fuera se encuentran los loqueros tan asesinos e infelices como mi pobre marido (*Viajar*, 1995: 141-142).

As can be ascertained from this excerpt, the “Diario de guerra de una periodista desolada” condenses the themes treated throughout the book into a subject that

speaks from the “Casa de Atrás”. When subjects are narrated through metaliterature, their destiny remains peripheral. And peripheral and marginal spaces allow only the existence of subjects in flight. The three chapters that, linked together, explored madness led to an apparently different place: the “país de los sexos múltiples” (*Viajar*, 1995: 106) and from there the text will frantically move through different ways of being an outsider, that is to say, a writer and a reader at the end of the twentieth century. The “viaje al país de los sexos múltiples” (*Viajar*, 1995: 106) insinuates and partially explores the possibilities of interpreting literature using the challenge to gender structures and strategies as interpretative tool. This “viaje” started after leaving behind a rendering of the place occupied by “locura” in literary evolution. While the strategies for silencing “locura” were narrated, the voice of female writers was made to talk. The link between genderisation and abjection was just being hinted at. Before allowing a subject to be fixed within the text and to reach full representation, the sphere that makes the subject exist is explained. In order to do so, the subject’s fixation has been avoided by what in psychoanalysis has been understood as mechanism of transference. From a feminist perspective, the most suggestive work on transference and countertransference has been done precisely on questions of authority and knowledge. Literary authority, the emergence of the authorial voice and knowledge of literature connect this book with the more recent *Letra herida* (1998), on which the next chapter will focus. The notion of subject is the link between Amat’s narrative and her critical writings. It is also the notion where feminist theories from all angles coincide. The prescriptive tone of the text ultimately

ascertains the representational consequences caused by the detachment of the authorial voice from a narrative I-ness that was present and representatively active in *Todos somos Kafka*. “La lectora” ended her text in a room with a window, talking to a dead author and having ended her literary quest insofar as she reached an awareness of her literary role: “Callar y repetir” (*Todos*, 1993: 223). We are now left in the same position, as can be ascertained from the first line of the epilogue of *Viajar es muy difícil* where Amat writes:

Este es un libro de viajes nunca hechos. En mi carpeta han quedado otros que finalmente he descartado. De lo contrario el libro sería infinito (*Viajar*, 1995: 173).

This perpetual flying away in order to challenge authority summons the concept of transference and the dynamics of abjection to the scene. The fact that the text finishes with a diary can be interpreted as a way of cancelling out the infinite nature Amat reckons her text could have had. The idea of transference illustrates and supports the position of the subject as an entity in flight. The role played by authorial voicing in Amat’s non-fiction works can be considered to answer to the same predicament. Elizabeth Wright distinguishes between structural psychoanalysis (psyche as text) and post-structural psychoanalysis (text as psyche), stating at the same time that this is not a neat historical division, but, rather, a division

based on a practice of reading, insofar as it concerns psychoanalytic criticism. In one case [structural psychoanalysis, psyche as text] the focus is on the reader in the text, both text of life and literary text, both determined by history and hence already written before the subject arrives on the scene. It is the reader who is transformed rather than the text. In the other case [post-structural psychoanalysis, text as psyche] the capture of the reader is not taken as final. [...]

In either case, the reader/writer distinction is no longer valid because making sense of the sign-system implicates both: each is caught in the net of signs, is up against language. Reading, writing and criticism are part of a continuum whereby readers write in the act of reading and writers are shown to read in the act of writing. [...] Texts can be made to turn upon themselves, meaning both less and more than the writer may have intended. The psychoanalytic concept of transference in its extended form [...] has changed the way in which the production of meaning is to be conceived (1998: 112-113).

The reader/writer distinction was already blurred, its difference challenged and explored, in *Todos somos Kafka*. However, in order to make sense, apprehend something, of the sign-system *Viajar es muy difícil* is, as literary text, a further self-reflexive act of interpretation is required. Yes, the reader is caught in the same net of signs the writer is caught in, but literature is also being caught in the net of signs that has conditioned its evolution. Already in Aristotle's *Poetics*, plot is revealed as the most important feature of narrative.¹¹ A more modern formulation of the Aristotelian stance might be to affirm that, in fictions, the givens of experience are ordered or reordered. *Viajar es muy difícil* is united and fragmented by metaliterature. It puts literature in general and literary commonplaces in particular at odds with itself/themselves. Wright has also analysed Derrida's interpretation of Freudian discourse as an act of reading it against itself in order to use "the very structures Freud discovered in language to undermine *his* system" (1998: 112). As a consequence, for her, the Derridean reading of Freud shows that Freud's texts cannot be frozen into a metapsychology. Amat's interpretation of the canon does not imply that metaliterature can turn out to be a discourse that congeals over time. It actually reformulates, prescribes anew while unsettling.

¹¹ See VIII, X and XVIII in the *Poetics*.

According to Kristeva, literature is the signifier of abjection and the experience of want its signified; consequently, the literary experience –undergone both by the writer and by the reader– will in fact be an acknowledgement of the “want” on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. The act of wanting to ascertain meaning somehow implies a previous loss:

Rien de tel que l’abjection de soi pour démontrer que toute abjection est en faite reconnaissance du *manque* fondateur de tout être, sens, langage, désir (Kristeva 1980: 13).

Reading *Viajar es muy difícil* psychoanalytically implies reading the abject or the possibility of its existence in the conscious or established form of literature. If a psychoanalytical reading is postulated, this implies that reading the abject is possible too. Having already stated that not having a unitary narrative voice in the text of *Viajar es muy difícil* makes up for the narrative of what frames the literary-subject, abjection cannot be denied. The abject is what the subject has to repress in order to emerge as a coherent being. The fact that this coherency is a mirage applies also to literary-subjectivity, not just to the processes of social regulation that frame the subject in the Real. What about symbolic subjects, the subjects read in the texts? What had to be repressed to make them become what they are known as? The Joyce that can be read about, the Bowles that can be read about: if they are texts, they also have silences. And these silences are filled with meaning, arbitrary of course, in the book.

According to psychoanalysis, the existence of the abject is not to be challenged: it surfaces occasionally in the subject realm but it exists prior to the subject's construction and as part of the subject's actuality as "*le propre*". There is also a proper historical or official account of the lives of the dead authors or "*padres literarios*". The subject's awareness of the presence of the abject constitutes a threat that can reflect "*l'aversion, la répugnance*". The lurking phenomenon Kristeva names as abject arrives from a condensed forgotten time, "*un temps effacé*" (1980: 16), "*le temps oublié*" (1980: 16), that has been obliterated by culture but remains within the individual prior to narcissism, i.e., individualised self-conception.

Judith Butler's views on abjection emphasise the interdependence of the subject and the abject at the level of social regulation. Kristeva maintains that literature is the signifier of abjection and the experience of want its signified. When repression is loosened and/ or challenged, the unconscious stirs and abjection steps in. Kristeva's theory of abjection invalidates the dichotomy subject/ object by introducing a third party, the abject, corporeal and unclean that has to be expelled so that the clean and proper subjectivisation process can occur. However, because of its corporeal existence, the abject cannot be expelled or omitted but repressed. For Judith Butler, power supports the subject founding it on an ambivalence of subjection and subordination: "power is external to the subject and the very venue of the subject" (Butler 1997: 15). For the American philosopher, "if the subject is neither fully determined by power nor fully determining of power (but significantly and partially both), the subject exceeds the logic of noncontradiction, is an excrescence

of logic, as it were" (17). Relating her approach to Kristeva's previous formulations, Butler also affirms that

the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation (1993: 3).

For Butler, the abject fails to be subject, i.e., fails to emerge as a constituent of the social 'I'. Can the same be claimed for the literary 'I', i.e., for literary subjectivity?

In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler, again grounding her theoretical assumption on the materiality of the body, explores a few literary texts. However, she does not conceptually reach abjection there. Kristeva's views of the abject as corporeal and unclean can be reinterpreted following Butler's analysis of the body as matter in the sense of materiality, the rationale of the textual analyses of literature undertaken in *Bodies that Matter*. Butler is primarily a gender theorist. What is missed in her otherwise exhaustive reinterpretation of psychoanalysis, that has used gender as a subversive catalyst, relates to the connection between the materiality of texts and the materiality of gender, both the creation of textual dynamics and of gender dynamics being connected to the psychic. The agency the abject can never claim at the level of representational reality can appear in textual reality, particularly if the text actualises a discourse that annihilates the holistic conception of the literary individual by narrating the paradoxes and untold sites of authorial identity. This is reading the abject in *Viajar es muy difícil* and is also creating an alternative arbitrary historical account that reflects literature. As has already been stated, the criteria used

by Judith Butler to analyse bodies as matter in the sense of materiality within textual systems of representation, both philosophical and literary, does not lead her to read abjection outside subject construction and within what surrounds the subject and conditions its existence in the Real. Although she finds herself moving in other directions at the thought of materiality neither she nor Julia Kristeva have read abjection as a phenomenon that has directly influenced the shape of culture and the collective unconscious, in the Jungian sense of the notion. Given that the Kristevan abject influences the world of text and of discourse and, at the same time, the realm of subjectivity, *Viajar es muy difícil* leaves the reader with the possibility of reading the abject. This can be achieved insofar as the different sections of the book leading to the “Diario de guerra de una periodista desolada” can be interpreted as devices that construct a strategy for recuperation and reformulation of meaning. In this way, as a whole, they symbolically attract the subject’s attention and illuminate the ultimate inconsistency of cultural notions of identity.

The challenge to authority Amat's text puts forward rests upon the implicit affirmation of the authorial power of the canon. The importance the “padres literarios” receive in her fiction will condition the emergence of the literary-subjectivity of her narrators, particularly the omniscient voice of *El país del alma* and the first-person narrator of *La intimidación*. The literary ‘I’ that will be narrated in *Letra herida* has the abject successfully incorporated to it. Amat’s early novels, which will be analysed in the first chapter of Part II, can be regarded as texts somehow abjected in respect to her bibliography because their more secondary

position in relation to the other books makes the interdependence between them similar to the one between subject and abject. For Butler, subject and abject become interdependent as social regulators. For Kristeva, literature is the signifier of abjection. In *Viajar es muy difícil*, Amat makes literary-subjectivity and abjection interdependent as regulators of the canon. By narrating the abject in the form of representational fissures of modern literary history, she manages to construct a new sphere of representation, one that causes the peripheral subject to exist. The force of exclusion and abjection Butler considers the subject has to repudiate in the Real is thus incorporated to the literary-subjectivity of the peripheral reader.

CHAPTER 3

***Letra Herida* (1998): RENDERING THE ARCHAEOLOGY**

OF THE AUTHORIAL SELF

1. LETRA HERIDA, Letraherida: WRITING THE WOUND

Mi cabeza no es una biblioteca que se pueda clasificar por temas, materias y argumentos. Yo bien la quisiera ordenada y dividida. Pero ella es como una masa informe a la deriva. Una cabeza poética. De ahí que sea mejor aguardar el momento del milagro. [...] Debo escuchar la apoteosis de la forma, darle un nombre, ofrecerle una presencia. Una tímida y dolorida presencia. Tengo que llenar la aparición con un mundo de palabras, hacerla mía, hacerla verdadera. Recomponer la herida (*Letra*, 1998: 16-17).

El tiempo suele jugar a favor de la sabiduría de la escritura. Lo importante es no perder la fiebre, permanecer hábilmente contagiada. *Letraherida* (*Letra*, 1998: 141).

To grasp fully the critical implications of *Letra herida*, it is necessary to move backwards and forwards. Backwards into what Amat has written before 1998 and also into what has been discussed up to now in Part I, and forwards into what will become the key elements of Part II, key elements of Amat's narrative poetics. *Letra herida* has to be analysed bringing together two perspectives, one that will become consolidated throughout this chapter and another that will be outlined. The

former refers to Amat's politics of representation, the latter to her narrative poetics, which will be analysed in Part II. Amat's narrative poetics turns metaliterature into an integral part of the textual tissue. The genesis of a gendered subject and the genesis of the literary-subject are key themes of these poetics. *Letra herida* was written once time had affected "la sabiduría de la escritura" of the author and published after *La intimidad*, Amat's first novel since 1982. With a discourse sometimes near to fiction sometimes near to essay form, *Letra herida* delineates the importance of narrative in general and the novel in particular for the author.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first approaches the title as a symbol of a literary state that consolidates an authorial self that yearns for a voice that can only be achieved momentarily, as the second quotation above indicates. In the pursuit of the "letraherida" state, *Letra herida* has been written. The second section of this chapter focuses on the third part of the book, "Postales a los muertos", made up of aphoristic statements, and will clarify in a more definite and conclusive way the critical importance of Amat's fictionalised leit-motives. The last section deals with the feminist challenge *Letra herida* poses to the canon, as a rhetorical construct that destabilises both gender and genre, the two equivalents of the word "género" in Spanish.

The opening quotation belongs to the essay "Revelación", from *Letra herida*, and tries to clarify the essence of "el misterio de la escritura" (1998: 16). The word "presencia" and the act of ascribing a signifier –"darle un nombre"– summon referentiality to the scene. The importance of naming and reference was already

discussed in the first chapter of Part I, as a key feature of the narrator of *Todos somos Kafka*. Barthes postulated the birth of the reader at the same time as he sentenced the author to death. To reach his conclusion, he resorted to referentiality, to the potential of acts of reference in general and naming in particular. So did Foucault in the essay “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?”. “La lectora” though does not have a name. She is only “la lectora”, the female reader, and it is paradoxically that lack of a proper name that secures her literary survival because, at the end of the text, when the author dies, she, as reader, is born. Barthes (1968) and Foucault (1969) resorted to referentiality and the power of naming to discuss the role of the author. Donald E. Pease sums up the controversy between Barthesian and Foucauldian views in his essay “Author” (105-117). His conclusion is clear:

The controversy surrounding the term “author” [...] may actually produce a material practice able to overcome the division in cultural realms that depends on such a partitioning (in Lentricchia & McLaughlin 1995 [1990]: 116).

Isolating key elements of literary production, such as the figure of the author, and turning them into centres of critical attention is tantamount to having them engaged in a “material practice”, understood in this case as production of theoretical or critical discourse. The act of assigning “presencia” to form can be regarded as an emergence of subjectivity. On the other hand, it cannot be forgotten that vindicating the figure of the author is somehow a bit of a critical taboo, but one that is unavoidably perpetrated as soon as the term “author”, so loaded with critical

implications, is touched, implicit or explicitly. And Amat touches on the term in her novels and in her other works.

A parallel can be drawn between the notion of subject and the notion of author. If the former has been privileged by psychoanalytical criticism and also by gender criticism, the latter has been widely discussed by key philosophers such as Barthes, Foucault and Walter Benjamin. Among narratologists, Waugh, in relation to reference, naming and the existence of character, the three elements common to theoretical writing, analysing the author in general or, in particular, the author of fiction, argues that

whatever their view of fiction, aestheticians and metafictional writers, in exploring the relations between 'fiction' and 'reality', all address themselves to two problems: first, the paradox concerning the identity of fictional characters; second, the status of literary-fictional discourse (the problem of referentiality) (1984: 90).

Waugh's claims, always between postmodernism and narratology, are focused only on fiction. This is also the case with the Hispanists who have dealt with the autobiographical subject.¹ The configuration of the 'I' in its many variants –fictive, biographic, and maybe even autobiographic; but, in any case, always literary– is a

¹ Hispanists such as Ballesteros (1994) and Ciplijauskaitė (1994 [1988]) have researched this area in relation to first-person narrative, thus producing another "material practice". Unfortunately, in the case of Ballesteros, her book stayed out of critical debate in gender criticism. In the second edition of Ciplijauskaitė's *La novela femenina contemporánea (1970-1985). Hacia una tipología de la narración en primera persona*, the author acknowledges that in the years between the first and second editions, feminist criticism has produced so much "material" that it is impossible to incorporate it into the original text. Her work, however, has the merit of being an extensive account of the exponents of European novels dealing, under many different perspectives, with female subjectivity and authorship. Like most critics, she did not mention Amat's early novels, although she does mention writers that, in 1988, had not published many titles. In general, the engagement of Hispanists writing on contemporary literature with contemporary gender criticism is rather infrequent. There are exceptions, like the very well documented critical introduction of the anthology of short stories *Rainy Days/ Dias de lluvia*, by Montserrat Lunati (1997).

key theme in Amat's production. "La lectora" defined literature as "una enfermedad" and diagnosed herself as being "presa de ese estado morboso" (*Todos*, 1993: 197). That was the basis of her characterisation. Any further discussion had to be based on that, and not on the fact that she was a woman. Her body did not essentialise her, literature did: it essentialised her in the same way the dead authors were essentialised. However, by narrating her quest for literary identity she is avoiding the essentialisation caused by genderisation. This process was achieved through a certain type of lexis: a semantic field made up of words related to "locura" and "enfermedad", already used in *Todos somos Kafka* and very much present in the novels that will be analysed in Part II. This is the lexis also exhibited in many of the essays, and indeed in the title of the book this chapter deals with: *Letra herida*. The second quotation opening this chapter has to be read within this contextualisation. Amat's voice makes a confessional remark: the key lies in a feverish state, in "permanecer hábilmente contagiada", thus summing up her attitude to referentiality. Referentiality has to be continuous, like the discourse contained in the succession of pages that make up a book. These remarks have to be circumscribed within Amat's treatment of "locura". On the other hand, these are also very conclusive and categoric remarks about female literary-subjectivity and authorship. However, they should not be read in a dogmatic way. *Letra herida* can be read as the best defined conscious exploration of what lies behind the literary signifier. What lies behind is a chaotic library, "una masa informe a la deriva", and what that chaos causes is metaliterature.

Notions of character, narrator and also author obsessively permeate her prose and they are always related to literary *jouissance*. In this way, Amat addresses “the paradox concerning the identity of fictional characters” (1984: 90) and also “the status of literary-fictional discourse” (1984: 90), as Waugh claims for the metafictional writer. Conclusively, Waugh infers that “a fictional character both exists and does not exist; he or she is a non-entity who is a somebody” (1984: 91). By focusing on the ontological status of character, Waugh is leaving aside the fictional status not only of the subject but also of the object. Conversely, Butler does not address the fictional status of characters in books, but writes extensively about identity as a fiction and the fiction of the subject:

If identity is asserted through a process of signification [e.g. a text], if identity is always already signified, and yet continues to signify as it circulates within various interlocking discourses, then the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an ‘I’ that preexists signification. In other words, the enabling conditions for an assertion of ‘I’ are provided by the structure of signification (1990: 143).

Literature, novels, are the processes of signification she has almost systematically left out of her formulations.² However, between these two exemplary formulations, the one of the postmodern narratologist on narrative and the one of the gender critic who has based her writing on disciplines other than literature, a gap can be found where literature would be privileged as structure of signification and the “paradox concerning the identity of fictional characters” (Waugh 1984: 90) exploited for

² The only exception is *Bodies that Matter. On the discursive limits of “Sex”* (1993).

narrative. Seeing identity as a continuum and as produced by discourse could in this way lead to the narration of literary-subjectivity: “letraherida”.

In order to discuss Amat’s depiction of the “letraherida” state in *Letra herida*, the notion of subject must be privileged and, consequently, so must the reading of Amat’s characters and plots as subjects and processes of subject construction and subjection, respectively. These have also been privileged notions in the works of gender theorist Judith Butler who has defined subjection as “the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” (1997: 2). *Letra herida* and “letraherida” consolidate the exploration of textual genesis, understood, as the real engine keeping literature, or rather, literary-subjectivity, going:

Se declara “letraherida” (escribir deja cicatrices) y le gustan todos los significados que “letra herida” traduce y con los que se identifica. “Escribir es como tener un amante secreto, una relación oculta que no puedes contar a nadie. Una pasión muda. Una relación que quieres dejar, romper, que sabes que ha de acabar y te va a doler”, explica la autora (Guardia 1998).

“Letraherida” is a state, a word invented and a description of a generic literature state. To grasp fully Amat’s treatment of literary genres and her monumentalisation of the dynamics and representational power of fiction as opposed to more concretely coined genres or modes of narrative, it is appropriate to resort to her own chronological evolution. In order to regard “letraherida” as a privileged, and also damned, creative state and literary pulse, the book has to be contextualised inwardly, as an examination of Amat’s authorial self, and outwardly, in respect to the position of the author in contemporary Spanish literature. This implies looking at Amat’s

production from a diachronic perspective. As a consequence, the territory of fiction will be reached and Part I concluded after giving consideration to the use of irony and to the relationship between gender and genre.

The question of agency is directly related to Butler's postulation of the tropological beginnings of subject formation. She characterises the notion of the subject not only as a necessary fiction but also as an artistic accomplishment, a trope that shall develop an 'I' that would stand over time. The subject is constantly on the move, always in a state of accomplishment and loss, never quite existing but perpetuating a need to exist, satisfying the desire to be social, human, to be signified, to possess social coherence. It is always unstable.

"Letraherida" is a state. However, for Amat, as author always in the process of becoming, any relation between fiction and reality has to be contextualised in literature. The role of literature in the real life of the writer interests her insofar as she believes that

La condición del novelista moderno exige un caminar invisible. Una pérdida de identidad que comienza precisamente en el momento en que uno se descubre escritor o novelista en una época ya saturada de padres lectores y novelistas de altísima categoría (*Letra*, 1998: 38).

The loss of identity turns contemporary novelists into "escritores invisibles" defined as "hijos inseguros de la gran literatura que siempre reproduce sus monstruos" (*Letra*, 1998: 39). Their invisibility, their insecurity and, ultimately, their monstrosity, all of these, of course, symbolic characterisations, cannot be separated,

in their dark symbolism, from the importance given by Amat to death and to suicide regarded as death in progress, i.e. susceptible of being narrated. If the death of the author is a consolidated critical dogma that influenced the loss of literary and critical importance of the biographical genre, Amat has taken the symbolism of the death of the author to the extreme and subverted it into the real, through fictitious biographical accounts. The result has challenged not the biographical genre, but biographical data. Biography matters, but matters in a different way, as the last aphoristic statement of the book explains:

El escritor ya no escribe su vida, escribe a través de su vida literariamente transfigurada. Y el mundo lo ignora (*Letra*, 1998: 235).

Amat talks about the literary forms biographical renderings can adopt and, in doing so, places the literary author at the centre:

Una de las diferencias entre diario y memorias consiste en que en la redacción del primero el autor intenta ser sincero consigo mismo. La sinceridad, por supuesto, no es un requisito literario pero sí ha llegado a ser, en muchos casos, una virtud encomiable. En el diario, el escritor escribe para sí mismo. Miente menos o se engaña más fácilmente. Por el contrario, en la redacción de sus memorias, el autor se disfraza para un público inmediato y la larga posteridad, y suele hacerlo con sus mejores galas (*Letra*, 1998: 22).

The differentiation Amat makes between “diario” and “memorias”, laid out in narratological terms, can be regarded as conceptually simple. However, it does have critical implications for the generic challenge implicit in the textual form of the books I have been analysing in Part I, namely that the relationship between author

and the form of literary history can be reinterpreted and an alternative text that blends literary history and literary production reformulated, as was the case, under different textual forms, in *Todos somos Kafka* and *Viajar es muy difícil*.

The importance given by Amat to the existence of character is primarily literary. In her works, the existence of character corresponds also to acts of reading and writing. As is the case with the concept of plot, the realm of character in Amat's prose must be thought through in order to make sense of the assumptions it brings into play. The realm of character, or rather, processes of characterisation are not present only in the novelistic genre. The relevance given by Amat to the literary-subject shown in the characterisation of authors, readers and writers implies that the notion of character blends with the notion of literary-subject and processes of characterisation blend with subjection, subjectivity, subjectivisation and subordination, all the terms that have been used to describe processes of subject construction. There is a relationship between character, understood in relation to the already mentioned processes, and literature, understood not only as sphere of representation but also as intertextual, endlessly self-reflexive, that can re-produce itself in metaliterary discourse, that can therefore undergo what I have previously termed emplotment. Amat sums up these processes in the notion of masquerade:

Lo verdadero y lo falso de la cocina literaria de un escritor equivale no tanto al truco del prestidigitador como a la multiplicidad de apariencias que toman los objetos en sus manos. [...]

Admito, por mi parte, una cierta voluntad en el alimento continuado de esta confusión de yoes y de géneros. Frente al acto de escribir es como si me colocara en la situación de tener que asistir a una fiesta de disfraces. La escritura que de veras me seduce [...] es la de la mascarada (*Letra*, 1998: 65).

And also:

La literatura es un país sin límites y el escritor, el paria errante de la palabra. Su lengua es su escritura. Es un perseguidor a la vez que un perseguido. Un exiliado voluntario del país de nadie. El auténtico diario del escritor es su biografía, y su vida, su literatura (*Letra*, 1998: 70).

Under this rationale, “Hizo libros y murió” (*Letra*, 1998: 35) analyses the figure of Faulkner progressively until reaching the role of death in his texts. No possibility of going further after that. But there is the possibility of exploring the relationship between silence and death in his writing and that is done in the same way as it was done with Cesare Pavese and with other “padres literarios”. It can be concluded that all of them are dead. These literary fathers are not fathers because they engender the female literary-subject but because they have produced literature and that is the sphere of representation against which identity has to be momentarily fixed.

The essay entitled “Literatura como salón de baile” (*Letra*, 1998: 65-74) shows that Nuria Amat has come to the same conclusion that “la lectora” came to in *Todos somos Kafka* (200-201), namely that contemporary novelists keep on writing metaliterarily, endlessly reflecting literature as intertext. She regards herself as part of them, and them, as failures. They are failing to write the definitive novel because they are trapped in the representational power of literature and that can never be fully exploited. Furthermore, in order to exist, that is what literature needs: trapped writers living in the “letraherida” state:

[...] nuestra condición de eternos fingidores fingimos ser Kafka, Joyce, Bowles, Mansfield o cualquier otro héroe o heroína literario.[...] Y seguimos escribiendo bendecidos por la idea feliz de que todos somos Kafka, una pandilla de alumnos sin descendencia que se multiplica desvergonzadamente. Los escritores, en fin, hasta tal punto somos fingidores que sobrevivimos a expensas de creer que, como mínimo, todos somos Kafka (*Letra*, 1998: 73-74).³

By explaining the “letraherida” state, *Todos somos Kafka* and consequently also *Viajar es muy difícil* appear as texts on their way to clarity. The representational potential of literature, the main theme of *Viajar es muy difícil*, and the areas of literary subjectivity and authorship appear conjugated in “seguimos escribiendo” (*Letra*, 1998: 74).

³ The fragment can be seen as a conscious elaboration, a succinct and precise exposition of the anagnorisis of “la lectora”. Once moved by the representational power of literature, we are all Kafka.

2. APHORISTIC WRITING

Todo lector atento es un Quijano de las letras, delirios de un chiflado, pero este mundo sin mundo no deja espacio para las aventuras de un demente (*Letra*, 1998: 235).

El lector atento es el que escribe para reconocer su locura y modificarla. Escribe para protegerse de la grave enfermedad de la escritura (*Letra*, 1998: 235).

Having already described “letraherida” as the identity of the literary-subject, that comes into being through accepting a perpetually problematic, wounded, state of literary being, it is now necessary to explore the third part of *Letra herida*, entitled “Postales a los muertos”, made up of aphorisms and very short texts. These are all grouped under the following headings: “Inclasificables y raros” (199-202), “Ilegibles” (203-205), “Ironía” (205-212), “Contranovela” (213-225), “Literatura y ordenador” (226-230), “Ensayo literario” (231-232) and “Escribir sin cuarto propio” (233-235). They can be read demonstratively as a condensation of the leit-motives that have inspired Amat’s prose. As such, they serve an illustrative function, like a sample of a bigger mosaic; hence the need to explore them separately in order to acquire a wider view of Amat’s rendering of the archaeology of the authorial self.

The aphoristic texts of “Postales a los muertos” can be read as an interpretative shortcut that narrows the distance between, on the one hand, the rest of *Letra herida* and the other books analysed in Part I and, on the other hand, the critic

who aims to read as the “lector atento” who appears in the opening quotations, a reader characterised further as “aquel lector capaz de superar la barrera defensiva que cada quien se coloca ante un libro sin género ni numeración tipológica” (*Letra*, 1998: 206).⁴ This way of reading reflects Amat’s way of writing in the books analysed in Part I. It also connects with the purpose of the quest of “la lectora” in *Todos somos Kafka*.

Although “Postales a los muertos” contains texts that are only two or three lines long, there are longer pieces surpassing the boundary of the sententia and invading the territory of the hypothesis and the essay. Etymologically, from the Greek, the term aphorism signifies ‘marking off by boundaries’ and, indeed, for Amat, aphoristic writing helps to challenge generic boundaries.⁵ This type of writing seems to precede the essay and also seems to be an abstraction of the recurrent ideas of her politics of representation and of her narrative poetics. Amat defines the essay as “la suma de textos narrativos escritos bajo un tono común de humildad poética. Es un texto con mirada humana” (*Letra*, 1998: 223), the essence of which consists of “una serie de tentativas novicias de un *amateur* que se niega a aceptar etiquetas literarias y se inhibe de ellas escribiendo su propia invención del género” (*Letra*, 1998: 223-224). Her definition of the essay axiomatically undoes generic principles. Genres can be seen as a continuum rather than pigeon-holed. She regards the essay as a text not meant for cohesion and, therefore, subjected to being broken down

⁴ The relationship between reading and self-resistance, contemplated from a feminist angle, has been discussed mainly in the field of feminist criticism and exploration of the autobiographical genre and first-person narrative moulds. For further reference, see Felman (1993) and Jelinek (1986).

⁵ For further reference, see Cuddon (1991 [1977]: 52).

aphoristically and also, one might assume, developed further into the essay form. It is prose and, defined by Amat, prose is the “campo fértil de pruebas de la existencia, de recreos y excursiones mentales sin rumbo determinado en donde el escritor da cuerda a sus pensamientos vagabundos” (1998: 231). It is then the quintessence of the dynamics of textual genesis. However, Amat also relates literary textual genesis to “locura”, as can be inferred from the opening quotation of this section. In her *Writing and Madness*, Felman alleges that

If madness so remarkably lends itself to aphoristic statements, to plays of language and effects of style, it could be said that even in philosophy, its function is rhetorical or literary. But, on the other hand, if one turns now to literature in order to examine the role of madness there [...], one realizes that the literary machine is most often a disguised philosopher: in literature the role of madness, then, is eminently philosophical (1985: 37).

Both madness and aphoristic writing have been related to textual genesis.⁶ Furthermore, critics dealing with the relationship between literature and mental illness coincide in affirming the subversive potential of that psychic entity colloquially referred to as madness and scientifically referred to as psychosis: the “locura” Amat narrates in her novels, repeatedly placing it in the intersection between the spaces of the “manicomio” and the “biblioteca”. From the point of view of the self-reflexive nature of Amat’s voice, the aphorism acts as a cavity of resonance. It is poetic, somewhat narrative as well, and also related, as far as content goes, to the philosophical domain. It is suggestive and conclusive, it settles a

⁶ For further reference, see Claridge (1990), Felman (1985), MacLennan (1992), Simms (1992) or Wood (1994).

momentary frame for the establishment and further discursive exploration of an idea. Elsewhere in *Letra herida*, Amat makes reference to the importance of short statements and their relationship to both discourse and silence. Discussing the role of silence, the essay “Sobre el silencio y la escritura” (18), starts with a confession:

Algunos escritores nos agarramos a las frases escritas por los autores muertos como si éstas fueran la única tabla de salvación frente al vacío de la escritura (*Letra*, 1998: 18)

and, after discussing the suicide of Cesare Pavese and the meaning of the last sentence he wrote nine days before his death, a sentence meant to be one of those “tablas de salvación”, Amat concludes that

Tal vez sea por eso que escribir seriamente consista hoy en impregnarse de ese gesto vanguardístico que mató a Pavese. Un silencio colmado de palabras que transforman la escritura en burbujas de silencios. Rompedoras, también, y esencialmente quebradizas (*Letra*, 1998: 19).

Pavese’s last sentence, an aphoristic statement, interpreted by Amat as “un cartel de entrada a la feria literaria del silencio” is brief: “*Todo esto da asco. / No palabras. Un gesto. No escribiré más*” (*Letra*, 1998: 18). It can be interpreted in two dimensions, both of them meaningful to comprehend textual genesis in Amat’s fiction. Firstly, the statement is related to suicide. The “gesto” needed not to write anymore is death. Death and literature are fatally interconnected in Pavese’s words and, also, it seems, in Pavese’s life, in the life of the man who wrote and died because he had written. Secondly, the signification Amat ascribes to Pavese’s words,

a signification relevant for her own writing leads us to consider the role of aphoristic writing and generic challenge in Amat.

Amat views fiction as a literary state of mind and regards the “estado de novela” as her favourite state of living and the preferred way of generating textuality. This is also the state referred to as “letraherida”. Furthermore,

En la novela cabe todo, como si la novela fuera la única habitación del escritor que permite el desorden de los géneros. Como si la única manera de ser escritora en este final de siglo fuera escribiendo novelas (*Letra*, 1998: 213-214).

In *Viajar es muy difícil*, Amat identified a space saturated with literary and narrative potential, called “La Casa de Atrás”. It is related to the configuration of the ‘I’ and to generic challenge or the challenge to any type of classification. It is the space of the outcast, from where marginal voices speak:

En la Casa de Atrás no hay espacio suficiente para guardar ordenadamente cada cosa. La escritora lo incluye todo en su diario. En el diario cabe todo. No es tiempo de separar memoria de lecturas. Una lo es todo. Un género literario nuevo y agotado. En el diario cabe el relato de la tragedia cotidiana, los sueños, las críticas de libros (no demasiados y seguramente mal elegidos), opiniones, amoríos, conversaciones y diálogos familiares, listas de ropa y alimentos e incluso una maravillosa guía-prospecto de la Casa de Atrás, también llamada Institución para la Permanencia Temporal de Judíos y Similares (*Viajar*, 1995: 63).

This quotation establishes a relationship between memory and reading, two entities that Amat separated only in her early novels.⁷ The relationship between memory and

⁷ In her first “libro inclasificable” or “libro sin voz”, *El libro mudo* (1988), in relation to the importance of the library in her own literary-subjectivity, she makes the following declaration: “considero mi biblioteca como el complemento principal de mi memoria” (*Mudo*, 1988: 40). This concise statement is developed further in the essays “Biblioteca interior” (169-176) and “Escritores que lloran, bibliotecarios que aúllan como lobos” (*Letra*, 1998: 177-195). See also “La biblioteca que

literature becomes the obsession of the female protagonists of Amat's most recent novels, the texts that chronologically frame *Letra herida: La intimidación* (1997) and *El país del alma* (1999).⁸ In the former text, it is part of discourse; in the latter, it is part of the silence of the book.

The configuration of literary memory and its influence upon the emergence of the literary-subject is the main theme of the books that have been analysed in Part I. Memory and literature turn out to be the obsession of the two female protagonists of Amat's most recent novels, the texts that chronologically frame *Letra herida*.

Throughout "Postales a los muertos", "muerte" and "locura" frequently recur, sometimes in relation to each other and sometimes separately. This happens also in the longer essays of the other three parts of the book: "La escritura del loco" (11-61) "Oficio de frontera" (63-125), and "Colección particular" (127-195). The textual voice of these texts, supposedly written in the "letraherida" state, is not afraid of expressing literary 'I-ness', sometimes it is an authorial voice that deals in a precise style with the metaliterary turn of the writing she has produced, sometimes, as in "Hijas comidas por los libros" (*Letra*, 1998: 92-105), it is a voice that chooses fiction to talk and to deal with an issue that clarifies the prose that can be ascribed to the literary signifier "Nuria Amat". It depends on the essay. On the other hand, due to its brevity, the aphorism can be considered to be opposed to the literary-subject that

otros llaman el universo" (*Mudo*, 1988: 43-75) which includes a selected critical and literary bibliography. This is a more academic essay, closer to Amat's works on librarianship whereas concessions to poetic discourse are made in the essays that belong to *Letra herida*.

⁸ On the contrary, *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, Amat's unpublished novel, reflects the relationship between memory and literature. It can be read as a sketch or rough draft of what would become in later works, a very powerful discursive trope, as will be discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

needs discursivity to exist. It can therefore be ascertained that the referential system of the “letraherida” state is ambiguous and unclear, plays with reality and literature or, rather, offers glimpses of the literary biography of the literary-subject appearing as narrator or authorial voice. The representational and referential uncertainty is somehow eased in the aphorism because it conforms to a discursive frame that can be comprehended. Although the subject stepping in and out of fiction, in and out of critical writing and pausing in the aphorism, openly expresses literary I-ness, i.e., the subordination to the sphere of representation literature signifies for the “letraherida” voice, it has to be remembered that, as was the case with “la lectora” in *Todos somos Kafka*, this literary-subject and authorial voice does not receive a name in the text elaborated. Not having a proper name problematises subjectivity further. However, it is also what turns subjectivity into narrative and narrative into a continuum the writer will necessarily be infected by –“permanecer hábilmente contagiada” (*Letra*, 1998: 141)–.

The books in Part I narrate, in different ways, literary representation as process, through the voice of a female narrator whose identity is not fixed against the sphere of representation of the social but against literature regarded precisely as such: as sphere of endless possibilities of representation and therefore signification. And in *Letra herida* Amat puts forward an idea that is meant to be conclusive but is not. What is left is writing, but writing is feigning and signification is always a mirage because it is always momentary. At the same time, however, one should remember that not to foreclose signification is one of the few ideas upon which

feminist critics from all critical schools have elaborated. It is a common ground, like the analysis of the influence of gender in literature.

As the next section will discuss, reading gender in Amat implies reading either its inscription or the fortunate impossibility of its inscription in the literary-subject. Literature, like desire, can be genderless but it can also opt for exploring gender or playing with it. “La lectora” explores the juxtaposition of female gender identity and female literary identity. This is also the case in *Letra herida*. However, there are aphorisms that offer a conclusive view on the relationship between genderisation and literature. The dynamics of literary creativity, in which women have culturally had the place of the object as muses or witches, is questioned and explored. Amat writes that

El escritor ya no escribe su vida, escribe a través de su vida literariamente transfigurada. Y el mundo lo ignora. El mundo rechaza a los mártires de la palabra, expulsa de su confortabilidad mundana a todos aquellos escritores que insisten en seguir creyendo que la literatura sirve para sentirnos mejores y mejor acompañados (*Letra*, 1998: 235).

To sum up, it can therefore be stated that the implications of writing through one’s life when one’s life is regarded as being “literariamente transfigurada” (*Letra*, 1998: 235) summons the psychoanalytical concept of transference to the scene and bridges the gap between psychoanalysis and narratology. Part II will delineate an approach that focuses on gender awareness and on deviations from more classical first-person moulds. As a consequence, the notion of first-person narrator, the concept of autobiography and, conclusively, the process of subject construction will be analysed

using the *bildungsroman* genre in a metaphorical way. Before all these critical pursuits are undertaken, it is necessary to establish a momentary fixation for the female literary-subject in order to counterbalance the destabilisation that awaits her within the dynamics of fiction, where the momentary nature of literary-subjectivity can be explored at its fullest precisely because its existence will be caused by and maintained through narrative.

3. BETWEEN GENDER AND GENRE:

A MOMENTARY FIXATION FOR THE FEMALE LITERARY-SUBJECT

Me siento a escribir con la voz postiza del conjunto desordenado de las grandes escritoras (*Letra*, 1998: 14).

Sitting down to write implies becoming a literary-subject, momentarily being an agent of production within the literary sphere of representation. Sitting down to read with or in order to find “la voz postiza del conjunto desordenado de las grandes escritoras” mixes abjection and genderisation in a process of literary-subjectivity. The great female writers form a chaotic assembly, outside the proper order of the canon. They can be considered the abjected group of the official history of literature. Like all marginal literary-subjects, their text originates in a very clear literary space: “la Casa de Atrás”, a space related to the configuration of the ‘I’, as was already mentioned in the previous section.

The relationship between gender and genre, both concepts that support politics of representation, conditioned “la lectora” in her attempt to become authorial subject. The title of the book, *Todos somos Kafka*, summed up the anagnorisis of her quest. *Letra herida* renders the archaeology of Amat’s authorial self and explains the death of the author as a literary motif of crucial importance. *Viajar es muy difícil*. *Manual de ruta para lectores periféricos* exposed literary sites where gender was

meaningful. In this way, it appeared related to female textual genesis and to “locura”. In the fictionalisation of key moments of the lives of canonical writers gender issues appeared as influential. The textual representation of the female literary-subject, belongs, like any other literary practice, to what Kristeva and Lacan have defined as the Imaginary. However, as is the case with any process of subject construction in the Real, this representation has to be a perpetual attempt and a perpetual intention, “letraherida”, with an always momentary achievement that nourishes the desire to represent more and to be represented further. Can the desire of the real (*Letra herida*) or fictitious (*Todos somos Kafka*) female writer ever be totally satisfied? The female narrator of *Todos somos Kafka*, “la lectora”, was determined to write a novel, i.e., she was determined to reach the “estado de novela”. It can be stated that she did not reach it, she remained, rather, in a metanovel state. She wrote about her longing to write and, her writing stopped at a very clear point, near the window. Instead of jumping, like Rimbaud does in the text, or like Deleuze, according to “El gesto del suicida” (*Letra*, 1998: 20-21), did in reality, “la lectora” remained quiet, lost in her literary thoughts and ready to keep on writing and reading. The canonical writers, most of them male, are dead. She is not canonical yet and has therefore to postpone death and keep on writing. Had her text continued, had not the book finished then, she might have been able to narrate “letraherida” and, as Amat, recognise herself in that position of literary-subjectivity.

Within critical theory, the analysis of the influence of gender in the formation of identity has operated between the scrutiny of the real, society, and of symbolic

practices, such as literature or photography. More specifically, within gender criticism, the controversy surrounding the term “subject” has actually produced a critical discourse that can be applied to the analysis of female literary-subjectivity and authorship, in general, and to Amat’s treatment of authorial voice and literary-subjectivity, in particular.⁹ This parallelism between subjection and literary signification is similar to the one postulated in the previous chapter between abjection and, again, the production of literary signification. The abject can exist at the time of the narration (the narrator’s time) and at the real time of the creation (the author’s time): the former relates to narratives of subjectivity, texts that generically go from the *bildungsroman* or novel of apprenticeship to more overtly autobiographical texts; the latter relates to what sustains the existence of a text in the cultural domain.

If subjectivisation is considered as the process by and through which the individual emerges as subject, i.e., agent of individual signification production, then, “subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never choose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency” (Butler 1997:

⁹ Judith Butler has repeatedly questioned material practices of signification:

Is there a pregiven distinction between theory, politics, culture, media? How do those divisions operate to quell a certain intertextual writing that might well generate wholly different epistemic maps? But I am writing here now: is it too late? Can this writing, can any writing, refuse the terms by which it is appropriated even as, to some extent, that very colonizing discourse enables or produces this stumbling block, this resistance? How do I relate the paradoxical situation of this dependency and refusal?

If the potential task is to show that theory is never merely *theoria*, in the sense of disengaged contemplation, and to insist that it is fully political (*phronesis* or even *praxis*) then why not simply call this operation politics, or some necessary permutation of it? (Butler, in Nicholson 1997: 301).

2). Judith Butler's definition of subjection as "the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject" (1997: 2) signals the submission to power as primary while presenting power as a double valence of subordination and production. For Foucault, power forms the subject conditioning not only its existence but also its desire. Metaliterary discourse can be considered to be subordinated to literature. Subordination and subjection emerge as major concepts in the development of the narration of *Todos somos Kafka* insofar as the text narrates the passionate attachment of a subject, the female narrator, to literature. Since she is at once formed by and subordinated to literature she is also implicated in what can be regarded as the scene of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, in Butler's words,

If the effect of autonomy is conditioned by subordination and that founding subordination or dependency is rigorously repressed, the subject emerges in tandem with the unconscious (1997: 7).

The subject does not exactly, solely or necessarily "emerge in tandem with the unconscious". This view forecloses the possibilities of agency of the literary-subject. There are many more relationships between the unconscious and what actually becomes subjectivised. It would be more accurate to talk about an emergence in perpetual dynamic interaction with the unconscious. Subjectivity and subjectivisation cannot have a unitary relationship with the psyche. The relationship between metaliterature, subjectivity and subjectivisation can be influenced by factors like gender and genre and by what these factors cast abjectedly down.

Ten years separate *El ladrón de libros y otras bibliomanías*, published in 1988, from *Letra herida*. It could be stated that both texts constitute a rendering of the author's literary poetics and two separate descriptions of her own views on the personal and the literary. Both texts display variants of the relationship between the personal and the literary and the union of both. Reading Amat's approach to literature and to female autobiography should not merely imply reading autobiography into the fiction or finding fiction in autobiography, as critics such as Marcus (1994) or Miller (in McConnell-Ginet et al. 1980) strongly point out, but being aware of the complexities of the literature of subjectivity and of the existence of a canon that excluded women's writing massively, hence the importance of observing gender and genre together, as key factors in the feminist reappropriation and re-creation of the spheres of interiority and subjectivity. As Miller points out,

The difference of gender as genre is there to be read only if one accepts the terms of another sort of 'pact'; the pact of commitment to decipher what women have said (or, more important, left unsaid) about the pattern of their lives over and above what any person might say about his, through genre. I say 'his' deliberately, not because men lead genderless lives, but because the fact of their gender is given and received literarily as a mere *donnée* of personhood, because the canon of the autobiographical text, like the literary canon, self-defined as it is by the notion of a human universal, in general fails to interrogate gender as a meaningful category of reference or interpretation (1980: 267).

Amat's narrators are always negotiating their identity and so is the authorial self exposed in *Letra herida*, so was "la lectora". Conversely, *Viajar es muy difícil* rendered the negotiation of instances of 'I-ness' without framing a unitary individual subject, character or author, but dealing with literary-subjectivity and subjectivisation

as constructs always in the making. The critical debate on the female autobiographical impulse remains ongoing in critical theory. Amat's texts contribute to this debate by implicitly questioning the relationship between gender and genre and exposing the subliminal influence of the former, not only in the configuration of character, a feature to be analysed in relation to her novels, but also in the development of literary criticism in relation to Hispanism. Her clear gender awareness can be read in the following aphoristic piece:

El mundo propuesto por las mejores novelistas de estos años ha sido subestimado en ocasiones por la crítica, que al no comprender esta nueva revisión de la voz y la palabra, ha preferido reducir este fenómeno a la definición de escritura femenina (el solo adjetivo me da náuseas) (*Letra*, 1998: 218).

The categorical end of the aphorism and Amat's views on literary identity –exposed either directly to the reader, as is the case with *Letra herida* and *El ladrón de libros*, or implicitly in the discourse of her female narrators, as is the case with *La intimidad* and *Todos somos Kafka*– question the supposedly unavoidable genderisation of character and, extensively, the subject. The relationship between writing and author and the relationship between gender and genre require, for their analysis, a reformulation of the sphere of the personal. Although she might not always undertake personal criticism, Judith Butler, by privileging the notion of the subject in her theoretical formulations, certainly performs a criticism of the personal anchored in political reality and, at the same time, deeply rooted in former philosophical theories of subject formation that she subverts and/or reinterprets thus giving a

metatextual approach to her formulations that could well be extrapolated to literature and, in particular, related to Amat's treatment of what has been isolated as metaliterature. Butler's criticism can be envisaged as an act of "getting personal" in criticism, and, as Miller confirms,

Personal criticism [...] entails an explicitly autobiographical performance within the act of criticism. Indeed, getting personal in criticism typically involves a deliberate move toward self-figuration, although the degree and form of disclosure of course vary widely (1991 [1986]: 1).

There are points of contact between Amat and Butler in the way they relate to already settled spheres of representation, such as literature, philosophy, history or sociology. *Letra herida* and *El ladrón de libros* can be read as two separate acts of "getting personal" in literature. In this way, the section entitled "Historia personal del libro" (1988: 15-42) narrates the influence of the book in the personal, i.e., gets personal with the book and gives a biographical account of Amat's reading habits. The importance of biography and the privilege given by Amat to the female literary-subject as narrator of the canon and of her literary activity cannot be separated. Amat justifies the relationship between female literary-subjectivity and narrative as follows:

De otra parte, si la gran lectora de novelas ha sido siempre la mujer parece lógico que sea en este campo donde al ponerse a escribir libremente haya terminado por conseguir también una revolución literaria. Una nueva o peculiar narrativa donde el adjetivo femenina le está de más, le sobra como un alfiler de perlas y brillantes colocado en el traje de un astronauta (*Letra*, 1998: 217).

One year after the publication of *La intimidación* (1997), *Letra herida* appears, and Amat returns to her critical writing. There is a difference between this book, published after the novel, and the other texts Part I has analysed, all published before *La intimidación*.¹⁰ From a chronological perspective, *Letra herida* cannot be considered a book without voice, a “libro sin voz”. It makes reference to the act of writing itself and to the defining feature of writer and text. In this way, it can be interpreted as a text that renders the archaeology of Amat’s authorial self. From this perspective, the text can be read as a literary autobiography or, in other words, a text that leads readers into “[...] un juego de *voyeurismo* literario”, as Enric Bou (1998) remarks in his review, appropriately entitled “Algunos textos de una mujer leída”. Voyeurism can be defined as the active form of scopophilia, the drive to look. Voyeurism and exhibitionism, the two forms scopophilia can adopt were conceptualised by Freud through a logic of binarism in which subject and object positions are self-exclusive due to their separation in clearly divided epistemological realms. Voyeurism and exhibitionism are inextricably bound with each other, according to psychoanalysis, which correlated masculinity with the former and femininity with the latter. Nuria Amat’s gender awareness does away with any attempt to objectify the feminine within her politics of representation or in relation to her narrative poetics.

La intimidación, as will be discussed in Part II, is narrated between two windows. In other words, after having invented a narrative about the jump with which *Todos somos Kafka* finished, Amat turns into discourse the “herida” whose

¹⁰ The novel marks a very significant juncture in Amat’s literary evolution. This will be discussed in detail in Part II.

pain can lead to the jump. The symbolic importance of the window in Amat's work was already mentioned in the first chapter, in relation to *Todos somos Kafka*. It will also be discussed in Part II, in relation to *La intimidad*. However, it has to be mentioned that the literary importance female writers have given to the window explains further the significance of *Letra herida* for Amat's evolution and for the reading of the book as metaliterature. The essay "El gesto del suicida" talks about the friendship between Foucault and Deleuze, two of the literary fathers of Amat. About Deleuze's sad end, Amat writes,

Para recomponer y poner un acento corrosivo a su insospechado final no solamente se mató. Sin ninguna necesidad aparente, Deleuze se tiró por la ventana. Es así como podrá seguir dialogando con Foucault en el reino de los autores muertos (*Letra*, 1998: 21).

And about Foucault, through Deleuze's statement and her own views:

¿Qué es un autor?, se preguntaba también Foucault para llegar a la conclusión contemporánea de que el autor ha muerto. El autor que se cree vivo no es más que un fantasma de las palabras. Deleuze decía de su colega y amigo que pocos hombres como Foucault habían muerto tal y como ellos suponían. Para colmo, murió en el mismo hospital de enfermos mentales donde había trabajado para concebir su *Historia de la locura* (*Letra*, 1998: 20).

"La lectora" did not think of herself as alive, a fact that cannot be separated from her obsession with suicide and the death of the author. In an interview carried out by Isolina Ballesteros (1998), Amat talks about her refusal to make a clear distinction between real and fictitious writers, a feature that conditions the development of the plot in some of the short stories of *Amor breve* and more clearly in *La intimidad*. She

states, however, that it is not a voluntary act. She gives some reasons for this, although emphasising that they are just hypothetical:

a) La más común es la que hace referencia al Quijote que de tanto leer novelas de caballerías se convirtió él mismo en caballero andante. Es posible que mi vida tan entregada a la lectura haya influido en esta confusión de escritor conocido y personaje ficticio a la que me entrego encantada.

b) Suelo decir que mis padres adoptivos han sido un psiquiatra (es cierto que, como la protagonista de *La intimidad*, yo nací en una casa próxima a un manicomio) y una biblioteca. De la misma manera que en mis libros me gusta demostrar las coincidencias entre escritor de libros y persona enajenada, también me gusta recrearme en un mundo de escritores que, gracias a mi varita mágica de la escritura, se ponen a vivir nuevamente y se van convirtiendo en la suerte de familia con la que convivo durante todo el proceso creativo.

c) Creo que la literatura es una conversación interminable con los autores muertos. Mis novelas son una consecuencia de esta idea [...] (Ballesteros 1998-99: 682).

Traces of this information can be found in *Todos somos Kafka* where a narrator deals with her becoming literarily “enajenada”, also in *Viajar es muy difícil* where known writers momentarily become characters and, finally, in *Letra herida* where these three points are present throughout. Furthermore, Amat herself makes reference to *La intimidad*, one of her recent texts. In these three points Amat is isolating elements that could be regarded as the pillars that sustain her metaliterary discourse and it is relevant to point out that their presence cannot be circumscribed to the “libros sin voz”. It can be claimed that in the “libros sin voz”, these topoi have been textually explored and they have produced a discourse that will creep around the narrative poetics of Amat’s four published novels.

Generically speaking, *Todos somos Kafka* is a novel, a first-person narrative whose structure, if considered separated from the content and from the features of the

text that can be considered as pseudotheoretical, cannot be dissociated from the one adjudicated to the *bildungsroman*. Still, it has to be remembered that *bildungsroman* is in itself a problematic term both from a generic and a rhetorical perspective. The *bildungsroman* usually narrates a process of identity construction against the background of a society observed by the reader through the eyes of the narrator. Interestingly enough though, the origins of the *bildungsroman* genre lie in recounting the biographical experience not of any individual, but of an artist in a more or less problematic relationship with society or the social. There lie the origins of the history of the *bildungsroman*. This plot is not that different to what actually happens in *Todos somos Kafka*. As *bildungsroman*, the text displaces the social by the literary as sphere of representation in order to narrate precisely how to become an author, how to emerge literarily. The relationship between gender and genre, both concepts that support politics of representation, conditions the narrator in her attempt to become authorial subject. She interacts with the canon in order to keep on writing, i.e., keep her own literary-subjectivisation going in order to conclude that, ultimately, “todos somos Kafka”. The title of the book sums up the narrator’s anagnorisis. *Letra herida* can be read as an exploration of the anagnorisis reached by “la lectora”. It can also be read as a more fictionalised, though equally challenging from the point of view of genre, elaboration of the conscious writing of *El ladrón de libros*.

Along with R. Alter (1975) and Waugh (1984), Linda Hutcheon was one of the pioneers of the concept of metafiction and master-narrative with her book *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1988 [1984]). However, one of

Hutcheon's most recent contributions to critical theory is a study of irony, the defining feature of the anonymous narrator of *Todos somos Kafka*.¹¹ And "la lectora" ironically narrates "la locura" Amat considers "infinita y variada" (1998: 171) in *Letra herida*. Like the narrator of *La intimidad*, "la lectora" is an ironic subject. Of course, on exploring literary-subjectivity and authorship, the notion of the subject is the one that has become privileged, sometimes even in its absence, throughout this exposition, privileged over notions of character and narrator precisely in order to connect gender and genre. Privileging the notion of the subject and exploring the dynamics of processes of subject construction has been the move executed in the nineties by influential gender theorists such as Judith Butler.

Is Nuria Amat then, as author, an ironic literary-subject? In *Letra herida* she aphoristically writes that

el mero hecho de escribir un libro raro ya es una cruel ironía. Una ironía por demás sólo advertida por aquel lector capaz de superar la barrera defensiva que cada quien se coloca ante un libro sin género ni numeración tipológica. Un libro sin sello (*Letra*, 1998: 206).

Her position within the panorama of Spanish literature is, in itself, ironic. There is a narrative piece in *Letra herida* entitled "Hijas comidas por los libros" (92-105) which can be read as a confessional and therefore self-reflexive fictionalised account of her position within contemporary Spanish literature. "Hijas comidas por los libros" tells the story of a pair of twin sisters, the daughters of Franz Kafka. One of

¹¹ Hutcheon, L. (1995 [1994]): *Irony's Edge. The Theory and Politics of Irony*. London: Routledge.

them wants to be like her father Franz and be possessed by writing and by literature. The other one wants to be like the grandfather Hermann, the one that denies the literary practice of his son. This girl writes successful novels praised by the grandfather who can only understand the development of literature and his granddaughter's position within it, if it comes accompanied by social and economic success. The other sister suffers in order to write and suffers for having the stigma of pain attached to her literary production. Her works do not get published. She and Franz Kafka disdain the texts of the successful novelist. But the silenced literary novelist needs to overcome the influence of the father, like any modern writer needs to surpass Kafka. The end of the parable is linguistic and explains "letraherida" further:

Es finalmente agradable ser una escritora nadie del país de nadie y sentirse entonces libre de escribir. Dan incluso ganas de ser una escritora con el objetivo exclusivo de reivindicar el derecho a expresarse en la lengua inexistente del país de nadie. Dan ganas de desenterrar todas las imposibilidades literarias, de olvidar para siempre todos los fracasos literarios y la gran certeza de que todo escritor después de Kafka es un fracaso literario. Dan ganas de escribir en mi no idioma de la tierra de nadie, haciendo caso omiso de que la literatura esté acabada desde antes y después de Kafka. Dan ganas de escribir y dejar de escribir al mismo tiempo, y para siempre, una vez consumado el asesinato de Kafka en el idioma Kafka y bajo la estrella delatora del nunca del todo perfecto Kafka (*Letra*, 1998: 104-105)

Letra herida is maybe the most self-reflexive of the books analysed in Part I. This started with a quotation from *Letra herida*, and has explored the basic ingredient and basic pulse of Amat's writing: that abstraction she calls "metaliteratura" which, as far as her writing is concerned, can be defined as the intersection that lies between intertextuality and self-reflexivity. In this study,

preference has been given to the term self-reflexivity rather than to the more psychoanalytical notion of self-consciousness, a notion that would have limited the analysis of *Todos somos Kafka*, *Viajar es muy difícil* and the other texts. Self-consciousness belongs to psychoanalytical studies of the self.

The themes of *Letra herida* are related to the ones treated in the other books analysed in Part I. However, from a chronological perspective this book cannot be considered a book without voice. The title helps clarify this point. Assuming that *Letra herida* renders the archaeology of Amat's authorial self, a conclusion should contextualise all the works seen so far. As a bridge towards the analysis of Amat's narrative, this contextualisation will also justify the importance of what Amat has described as "el estado de novela". In an interview carried out by Natalia Gamero for *El Cultural* (18/7/99), Amat is asked about the literary genre she feels most comfortable writing in. Her answer is conclusive:

[...] en ninguno. La comodidad es mala compañera para la creación literaria. Ahora bien, [de todos los géneros] prefiero la novela porque dura más. Mi estado preferido de vida es el de novela.

Within the Spanish literary scene, Amat has occupied a marginal position and has also cultivated it further with her tendency to choose small press houses to publish her books.¹² In 1997, Nuria Amat changed this habit and gave her novel *La intimidad*

¹² For a thorough critical exploration and political explanation of her linguistic choice, see the chapter "¿Qué lengua pertenece a quien?" (129-138).

to Alfaguara after having remained with Anaya & Mario Muchnik for fifteen years.¹³ *Letra herida* appears in 1998, one year after the appearance of the novel *La intimidad* (1997).

Chronologically, Nuria Amat belongs to the so-called Spanish New Narrative and her name could be included in this eclectic ensemble. However, her name hardly ever appears in the numerous classifications that have proliferated in the nineties and have attempted to organize into categories the Spanish novelists that started to publish after the end of the dictatorship. In spite of this, reviews of her works of fiction, written by renowned authors such as Eduardo Mendoza, Juan Goytisolo, Eduardo Haro Tecglen or Ana María Moix, abound. Amat is regarded as an invisible writer by the same critics that write excellent reviews about her work.¹⁴

From what has been said about (female literary) subjectivity and subjectivisation in Amat's "libros sin voz", it can be ascertained that the configuration of the 'I' not only in the form of narrative voice but also in the form of authorial voice is one of her key literary topoi. It could perhaps be regarded as an obsessive theme and maybe the novels will reveal it as the only theme to which the rest of her narrative poetics is subordinated. Part II will deal with this aspect and will examine how the relationship between memory and reading supports the configuration of the 'I' in Amat's narrative poetics. The authorial voice of the texts

¹³ Ruben Wisotzki in *El Universal* (Venezuela, 29/11/98) looks back on Amat's beginnings: "Descubierta como escritora por el editor argentino Mario Muchnik, fue tentada por el poeta español Carlos Barral para que publicase su primer libro cuando tenía 25 años [...]".

¹⁴ Amat's absence is all the more surprising given the diversity of criteria used to classify chronologically or thematically (e.g. Davies 1998, Martínez Cachero 1997). She is briefly cited in the bibliographical compilation carried out by Levine, Marson & Waldman (1993).

that generically approach the essay form and the narrative voices of Amat's fiction rest upon the relationship existing between memory and reading. The notion of subject will be privileged and, as a consequence, the literary-subject "Nuria Amat" will need to be contextualised further.

Part I has progressed from the most nebulous of Amat's "libros sin voz" to the one exhibiting the clearest discourse. Metaliterature appears as the active ingredient in the emergence of the literary text. Uncovering the influence of literature within the textual tissue of a literary creation implies juggling intertextuality and self-reflexivity. Notions of authorship and authority and, consequently, the presence of that component called author in a text can be considered to resignify by being taken as momentary fixations. The presence of metaliterature, explored in Part I, is consolidated in Amat's novels, the progression of which can only be fully understood by appealing to the exploration of textual genesis contained in the books analysed in Part I.

PART II

THE GENESIS OF THE GENDERED SUBJECT:
BETWEEN THE DISCOURSE OF THE LAW
AND LITERARY DISCOURSE

CHAPTER 1

Pan de Boda (1979) AND *Narciso y Armonía* (1982):

THE EARLY NOVELS AND THE DESTABILISATION OF SEX,

GENDER AND BODY

1. PAN DE BODA (1979): FEMALE IDENTITY IN A FEMINIST AND

FOUCAULDIAN ANALYSIS OF MATRIMONY

acusaciones alegadas contra mi cargo [diatriba en contra de mi irracionalidad]
porque roberto es un abogado de los otros
porque roberto se sentirá obligado a actuar en consecuencia
al credo de su despacho y a aceptar
que el ser marido le ha convertido en cliente
porque roberto es y será un hombre civilizado
una suerte de doctor cobarde ante un sí de vida o muerte
infalible y combativo frente a las dolencias clásicas (*Pan*, 1979: 107-108).

As I have discussed in Part I, the link that unifies the exploration of Amat's novels is the existence of a metaliterary dimension in all her texts, different dialogic relationships with the "padres literarios", in a sense predicaments similar to the stages of the quest of "la lectora", a quest that stopped just before the window that opened itself to narrative and to the death of the author. In *Pan de boda*, the literary is present in two dimensions: as part of the characterisation of the narrator as social

subject, and as part of the theoretical dimension of the text. These two strands will be the main focus of this section. The poetic monologue that constitutes the text of *Pan de boda* will be analysed from a feminist perspective, in relation to the interpretative applicability of Foucauldian theories that can be abstracted from this work. In addition, the importance of the theoretical and critical rationale of Amat's first published text will be discussed. Particular relevance will be given to the view, offered by the text, of the power of the essentialisation of woman as feminine and hysterical within a social structure in the process of change, the Spanish society of the end of the seventies, the years of the transition to democracy.

The objectification of women has been sustained by the essentialisation culturally communicated by and through the materiality of the body and the specificity subsequently constructed by linking the adjective feminine with the noun sex. The exploration of the relationship between sex and gender and its influence on the configuration of the identity of the female subject within the institutional frame of matrimony condition the development of Maite's narration of herself and her marriage. *Pan de boda*'s plot "se pierde en los breves instantes que separan el sueño del despertar", as Anna Díaz-Plaja states in her introduction to the book (*Pan*, 1979: 5). Throughout her "duermevela", Maite, the narrator, brings into being a discourse that narrates the social production of hysteria. Articulated halfway between consciousness and unconsciousness, the lines of the book, poetic prose without punctuation, clauses separated by typographical blanks, unfold a portrait of the narrator. Maite is a woman that others describe as nervous, she spends time in

literary pursuits but has not yet published a book, she works in the advertising sector and also teaches philosophy at university. These details offer an image of the narrator as a social subject. With this information on the background, throughout the text, we witness how her body is becoming hystericised. This process is sustained by the voices of the persons who incarnate the Other in Maite's life: parents, work colleagues and, mainly, Roberto, her husband. Roberto's discourse has a place within Maite's monologue. As can be observed in the excerpt opening this chapter, when she reproduces his words and lets him speak, relevance is given to the concept of law in the Foucauldian sense, as mediatory in Roberto's relationship with the world outside. Roberto, apart from being a lawyer, and, furthermore, a progressive one, is a symbolic representative of what Foucault understands as law. As such, he is a "esclavo de la ley que tanto ataca" (Pan, 1979: 22). The place of woman inside matrimony is part of this law. The concept of Law with a capital 'L' is a key concept in Foucault, and Maite, as narrator, plays with it; law understood in a very polymorphous sense, not only as a legal system that rules society but also as a set of codes, not necessarily written or spoken, that remain articulated as part of what is regarded as culture. The law, in this sense, codifies the norm and what is regarded as normal. The more his discourse is spoken in the monologue, the more Maite understands that Roberto is a slave of tradition, cannot think outside its models, cannot, after all, think anew the bond of marriage. In this way, he tries to reinterpret for Maite traditional ideas that essentialise her body, women's body, as hysteric when he tells her that she thinks too much (Pan, 1979: 31).

The text of the novel originates in a bed, an element of crucial importance in Amat's narrative. Both the narrator of *Todos somos Kafka* and *La intimidad* dream about writing a novel from their beds. In the bed of a rest home for women of affluent families dies Nena Rocamora, the narrator of *El país del alma*. Like Nena Rocamora, Maite also narrates the silence of her matrimony or, rather, they both lay out a narrative reconstruction of what matrimony has silenced in them. However, as opposed to Nena, it cannot be stated that Maite loves her husband. Nena loves Baltus with a love deeply influenced, and arguably caused, by literature. Both female narrators are characterised as nervous women. Indeed, most of Amat's main female characters and narrators are characterised as such. The presence of literature can be traced in the lives of both Nena and Maite, although, while Nena tries to understand herself through reading and is portrayed as a frustrated writer, Maite, a generation onwards, tries to understand herself through writing, the literary activity that gains relevance as her narration evolves. If the presence of literature in the lives of both women is compared in relation to Amat's chronological evolution, the influence of metaliterature is revealed. The novel written after *Letra herida* exposes the portrait of a generation that chronologically corresponds to Maite's parents, to the parents of the narrator of *La intimidad* and also to the parents of the author.¹ In the novel written before the "libros sin voz", the narrator shares the author's state of early literary-subjectivity. The influence of reading can be located in the domain of the author but

¹ As Masoliver Ródenas, among others, states in his article "Cuerpos y almas":

Nena nació en 1923: pertenece, pues, a la generación de los padres de la escritora, si bien es fácil en su caso identificarla con ella (*La Vanguardia*, 25/6/1999).

not of the narrator. The narrator is the recipient of the author's reading. It is from this perspective that a Foucauldian reading can be undertaken. In the novel written after the "libros sin voz", the author returns to a time and a social background that is related to her origins and is able to reinvent it through the use of literary material. The metaliterary dimension of *El país del alma* is much more elaborated insofar as it subtly permeates the area of characterisation, influencing it strongly.²

The bed from which *Pan de boda* is narrated is neither a hospital bed nor, as could be assumed by the title, a marital bed. The text originates in Maite's childhood bed in her parents' house. In that bed she lies, half asleep, half awake, hearing the footsteps of her mother. These were heard also on the morning of the day of her wedding to Roberto, when her mother went to wake her up. The scenario repeats itself, only this time three years have passed and her marriage has just finished. The footsteps of the mother propel remembrance and frame the textual evocation of this poetic interior monologue. On this occasion, Maite senses that her mother's footsteps keep a deliberate distance or are maybe just respecting the private space marked by a bed in which an adult woman, and not a girl, is sleeping. This woman, Maite, is nearly thirty years old, she is seven months pregnant and has just left her husband.

My reading of the novel, a reading that can be defined *grosso modo* as feminist and Foucauldian, is, to a certain extent, also psychoanalytical. The category of hysteria conditions the thread of the narration. It is necessary to appeal to

² In interview (Barcelona, 18/6/1999), Amat has remarked that the character of Nena is, for her, a homage to the figures of writers that have influenced her. From this point of view, features of the lives and work of writers such as Emily Dickinson, Katherine Mansfield, Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf or Mercè Rodoreda are present in the text.

psychoanalysis in order to understand the terms on which the social articulation of hysteria has developed.³ Dealing with hysteria in psychoanalytical terms ultimately entails an exploration of the relationship between sex, as Foucauldian category, and identity, a relationship at the core of Maite's discourse, and also at the core of the characterisation of Narciso and Armonía, the characters of Amat's second published novel.⁴ Amat's interest in the influence of sex in the configuration of identity appears to be much more important in her first novels than in *La intimidación* and *El país del alma*. This does not mean, as Masoliver Ródenas suggests, that "no hay sexualidad ni siquiera sensualidad en Nuria Amat" (*La Vanguardia*, 25/6/99). This assertion comes from a critic who, when listing Amat's works, ignores her publications prior to *Amor breve* (1990). The relationship between sex and identity always signifies in Amat. It is a very explicit signification in her early novels and it is something more internalised and complex in the recent ones. Sex is something explored by the narrator's voice in *Pan de boda* and *Narciso y Armonía*. However, it is delicately constructed through metaliterature and embedded in textual silence in *La intimidación* and *El país del alma*, where silences related to the body signify. The absence of an explicit exploration of the category called sex can be actually understood thanks to the way Amat dealt with it in the early novels.

³ A very illuminating research project, so far not undertaken, would be to study the usages and definitions of hysteria, from scientific to essentialist meanings, which, from a feminist perspective, could be considered as pejorative.

⁴ Amat conjugates the physical with the psychological in her second published novel, hence the different treatment of the relationship between sex and identity. As opposed to *Pan de boda*, the importance of genderisation will be revealed in *Narciso y Armonía*.

In a way, the observation of hysteria as a psychoanalytical pathology has been a key area for the feminist subversion and reappropriation of the so-called seminal theories of psychoanalysis, i.e., the Freudian and Lacanian schools. Novels such as *Pan de boda* or *El país del alma* by Amat or *Les Guérillères* by Monique Wittig (1969), help through narrative discourse to deconstruct psychoanalysis and subvert it on its own terms thus showing the blindspots of the discipline. Through theoretical discourse, Foucault made a similar move.⁵

Maite remembers homosexual fantasies she had when she was a child and she wonders what her lesbian fantasies tell her about herself at the time of remembrance, “ahora que ya no me pregunto nada y acepto sin oponer resistencia” (*Pan*, 1979: 61). What apparently is a marginal episode in this book, written in a simple language but with a poetic form, will become a key theme in Amat’s second publication, written in poetic discourse but, as shall be seen, under a rather predictable form. Maite interprets her fantasy in a way similar to that in which the omniscient narrator of *Narciso y Armonía* (1982) will interpret the couple these characters form:

contemplando mi cuerpo como jamás he hecho
mirándome y gozando con la duda de que quizá yo poseo
o de pronto
me he convertido en animal de dos sexos (*Pan*, 1979: 59).⁶

In 1905, Freud’s “Fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria (“Dora”)” offered irrefutable evidence that hysteria owed its cause to the complexity of sexuality,

⁵ See Amat’s article “La erótica del lenguaje en Alejandra Pizarnik y Monique Wittig” (1979).

⁶ In relation to the presence of homosexuality in Amat’s text, see below the section on homosexual panic in Chapter 3, Part II.

subsequently concluding that hysterics exhibited also homosexual tendencies. As Freud's title –“Fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria (“Dora”)”– indicates, what he is narrating is just a fragment. More to the point, his treatment of the theme and of the patient has to be considered as fragmentary, in the sense of partial and inconsistent.⁷ Considering it a psychiatric pathology, Freud treated hysteria as a whole that exists settled in the patient's psyche, to which he had a privileged access as analyst and as male. Foucault, due to his anti-androcentrism, examined it as a historical process inextricably linked to the biological and social female body. Regarding it as a process, he discussed hysteria without treating the psyche. His conclusions on the process of what he calls hysterization of the female body are categorical:⁸

Hystérisation du corps de la femme: triple processus par lequel le corps de la femme a été analysé – qualifié et disqualifié – comme corps intégralement saturé de sexualité; par lequel ce corps a été intégré, sous l'effet d'une pathologie qui lui serait intrinsèque, au champ des pratiques médicales; par lequel enfin il a été mis en communication organique avec le corps social (dont il doit assurer la fécondité réglée), l'espace familial (dont il doit être un élément substantiel et fonctionnel) et la vie des enfants (qu'il produit et qu'il doit garantir, par une responsabilité biologico-morale qui dure tout au long de l'éducation): la Mère, avec son image en négatif qui est la “femme nerveuse”, constitue la forme la plus visible de cette hystérisation (Foucault 1976: 137).

Of course, Foucault is making an implicit allusion to Freudian analysis when he mentions the labelling of hysteria as immutable within certain medical disciplines. For Freud, hysteria was a subject of analysis because it belonged to the psyche of his

⁷ Freud's misuse of power is related to the cruelty with which he treated Dora. For further information, see Moi (1981).

⁸ “Hystérisation” was translated as hysterization by Hurley (1979 [1978]: 104).

female patients and psychoanalysis would not have been possible without the willingness and desire to be analysed on the part of those hysterics first treated by Freud. Their speech was removed; Dora's case is the closest we can get to it but that discourse was the foundation of analysis, even though Freud's treatment of many female patients led to his most spectacular failures. The relationship between hysteria and psychoanalysis is therefore paradoxical. Although it can be regarded as an emblem of the continuing ambivalence between psychoanalysis and feminist theory, it can also be claimed that Foucault's approach can be used to reduce the paradox.

Pan de boda narrates the social production of hysteria, Foucauldian theme *par excellence*, but through the female psyche, i.e. also in a paradoxical way, like Freud did, but also unlike Freud did. As in Freudian analysis, in the psyche lies interpretation: Maite's psyche is and becomes the receptacle of hysteria. As opposed to Freudian analysis, this discourse exhibits the hysteric's discourse: the object of analysis speaks, exercises *jouissance*, and becomes the subject of the narration. It is true that hysteria and sex are related but only the subject that results from the articulation of hysteria, Maite, can elaborate a discourse that exposes how others articulate her as hysteric until the moment when her neurosis becomes permissible, even desirable. This happens when Maite gets pregnant and becomes a subject without a sex, like the Virgin. The interest in essentialising her passes on to her baby, a girl. Maite, interpreting Roberto's obsession for knowing the sex of the child they are expecting, writes:

¿sexo? ¿preguntas?
 de eso estamos hechos tú y yo
 de eso que cuando nos une separa
 de eso que cuando complementa mata
 de sexo vivimos muriendo por asumir la palabra
 nos amamos bajo la autoridad del sexo
 nos escupimos detrás del aro del sexo
 nos olvidamos luego de suplir un sexo con otro sexo
 nos casamos para asegurar el doble candado del sexo
 nos divorciamos para presumir la independencia del sexo
 De sexo
 he ido ciñendo mi cintura hasta degollar el último residuo de eso (*Pan*,
 1979: 106)

Pregnancy has removed the category of sex from her subjectivity and turned him into a momentarily understanding human being she cannot trust anymore. She will never speak these words to her husband in reality. The text of the novel, as in *Todos somos Kafka* and *La intimidad*, is the text of the mind and is totally separated from the narration of her material life. The sphere representing the more physical aspects of her everyday life always remains in the background because what is relevant is the interpretation Maite makes of her matrimonial self. And when interpreting it, she reaches the same conclusion that Foucault reached: sex is what you are, sexuality what you do. Foucault (1976) postulated the social production of sexuality as a consequence of the repression of sex under the multiform influence of power. The “sexo” Maite talks about, as the Foucauldian category, is progressively restricted, progressively foreclosed by marriage and maternity, the spheres that manipulate its existence or non-existence. The relationship between sex and motherhood, regarded as a totalising form of identity, makes her neurosis typical and normal. As has already been mentioned, Maite, at the moment when her text is being articulated, is

nearly thirty and is pregnant: she is therefore on the verge of turning into what Foucault interpreted as the most hysterical of the female archetypes, the mother. However, Maite has used her pregnancy, which justified her hysteria in Roberto's eyes, for her own benefit. She knows she is going to have a girl and she wants to control her life again. This can only be achieved by using the Law to her own benefit and redefining her subject position in respect to it. Her experience has then been textualised thanks to pregnancy and to the prospect of becoming archetypically a Mother but already being a "femme nerveuse".⁹

For critics such as Aladjem (in Hekman 1996), feminist criticism and Foucauldian theory can be observed to complement each other at their best in the analysis of marriage as institution. In the diachronic exploration of marriage offered in the third volume of his *Histoire de la Sexualité: Le souci de soi* (1984), Michel Foucault focuses his attention on very concrete forms of marriage instead of finding a common cause between them. Had he aimed to do so, he would have needed to explore marriage from the perspective of the female subject. He did not pursue that line of thought, although it is true that, having related the discourse of power to the discourse of identity, he destabilised precisely the structures of power that have historically essentialised the female subject as feminine and/or hysteric. Foucault clearly separated sex from sexuality, claiming that the category of sex is restricted by the deployment of alliances and exclusions that sustain the construction of a correct, healthy, good and productive sexuality, as opposed to the construction of a sexuality

⁹ Pregnancy has also impelled anagnorisis in Carme Riera's *Una primavera per a Domenico Guarini* (1980) and Marina Mayoral's *La única libertad* (1982).

that is dangerous, bad, perverse and, ultimately, excessive in its use of pleasure. One of these alliances is the institution of matrimony; another one is, for example, the family unit, also historically analysed by Foucault.¹⁰

The text of *Pan de boda* represents marriage inside an easily recognisable context: the Spanish bourgeoisie of the end of the 70s, at the time of the transition to democracy. The difficulties younger generations had in order to think and conceptualise alternative social models and moulds in the midst of a sociological structure in the process of change is one of the contexts that can frame Amat's first published novels. Another one is French feminism, not only the writings of Cixous, Wittig, Kristeva or Irigaray, but also, and indirectly, those texts that have reinterpreted and subverted the theoretical writings of Michel Foucault and, in doing so, have furthered the exploration of the categories of sex, gender and body and their influence upon the production of identity and the emergence of the subject. Of particular importance are, in this case, recent contributions to gender studies and queer theory, critical branches that share epistemological points of contact with Amat's writing and that will become more evident in relation to recent novels. The

¹⁰ The opening of Foucault's *Histoire de la Sexualité. I: La volonté de savoir* sums up this rationale. Having claimed that nowadays a Victorian regime is still supported and still shapes the norm, he then moves on to present the characteristics of this regime, which will be carefully dissected in the chapters that followed his introduction:

La sexualité est alors soigneusement renfermée. Elle emménage. La famille conjugale la confisque. Et l'absorbe tout entière dans le sérieux de la fonction de reproduire. Autour de sexe, on se tait. Le couple, légitime et procréateur, fait la loi. Il s'impose comme modèle, fait valoir la norme, détient la vérité, garde le droit de parler en se réservant le principe du secret. Dans l'espace social, comme au cœur de chaque maison, un seul lieu de sexualité reconnue, mais utilitaire et fécond: la chambre des parents. Le reste n'a plus qu'à s'estomper; la convenance des attitudes esquivé les corps, la décence des mots blanchit les discours. Et le stérile, s'il vient à insister et à trop se montrer, vire à l'anormal: il en recevra le statut et devra en payer les sanctions (1976: 9-10).

influence of thinkers such as Freud and Foucault has provided these theoretical formulations with a consistent base and that base is an influence also active in Amat, hence the need to trace the influence of these thinkers in her first published work.

Modern marriage is, of course, different from the nineteenth-century marriage analysed by Foucault. In literature, it has very often shared the space of the text with the exploration of the so-called feminine tedium, as Martín Gaité alleges in her book *Desde la ventana* (1987) and, as will be discussed, tedium is part of the characterisation of Nena Rocamora, female protagonist of *El país del alma*. The relationship of the 1999 novel with nineteenth-century literature is similar to the relationship outlined in this chapter between *Pan de boda* and Foucault and Freud, via Foucault. By making a Foucauldian reading of *Pan de boda*, it has been possible to reach Freud and to identify the blindspots of both male thinkers. On the other hand, the treatment of feminine tedium in *El país del alma* also fills in the silences of the novels that narrate the characters Nena Rocamora reads and her characterisation reflects. In any case, the classic masculine ethos of domination that extended itself to the home, to the wife and to properties can be regarded as partially or totally, depending on personal opinion, immutable. It exists as representational mode and, as such, it has the logical potential to remain out there without disappearing, ready to be thought by the subject and therefore ready to exercise subjection.

Foucault's coinage of the hysterization of women's bodies relates it also to the social. Maite's subversive although silent attitude towards the norm surfaces in the symbolic production the text, as literature, ultimately is. At the level of the Real,

one reads Maite's silent and passive, but also pensive, posture in relation to the social body in general and to established social frames and institutions such as the family or matrimony in particular. The novel can be considered a self-reflexive text that explores the influence of social acts of representation that turn into misrepresentations through the narrator's process of estrangement. The unfolding text can therefore be considered a mirror in which Maite is reflected. As Anna Díaz-Plaja indicates:

el hilo de la narración descansa en la protagonista. Maite se mira en un espejo y éste le devuelve infinitas imágenes. Maite quiere hablar desde todas ellas: cuenta su historia, se la explica a sí misma, se esconde tras un narrador impersonal, se dirige a su marido, Roberto, o le cede la palabra para que describa a una Maite en la que ella no se reconoce. Pero siempre es Maite quien se pierde en sus evocaciones, quien reproduce los hechos más nimios o se escapa en el caballo alado de sus sentidos (*Pan*, 1979: 6).

As in a classic *bildungsroman*, Maite tries to understand as narrator what she could not understand as character. Her text is a conclusive socio-psychological analysis of the workings of the law. Foucault's categorical statement that we must "penser à la fois le sexe sans la loi, et le pouvoir sans le roi" (1976: 120) illustrates the textual workings of the Law in the novel. The Law is thus understood as abstract concept that represents the codification of the norm and of what is normal. The use of legal terms in the text sustains this symbolic representation and conveys the representational power the abstract concept of the Law has. That Maite uses legal vocabulary to write about her relationship with Roberto and about its outcome is particularly revealing. The excerpt cited at the beginning of this section is a good

example of this. Maite articulates the outcome of her strategy for getting out of the “fatal parsimonia del nudo matrimonial” (*Pan*, 1979: 111) in legal terms that are meant to signify defeat:

[...] me inscribo en la lista negra de la actividad penal soy un continente de alegatos un rasgado tachón de tinta postrado bajo tu firma impresa en nítido papel higiénico (*Pan*, 1979: 109).

By placing a female adult subject in what can be considered from a sociological perspective the most commonly adopted legal frame and making her silence speak, the reader gets an exploration of the relationship between a female subject socially framed by the law of matrimony, but psychically alien to it and therefore mentally producing a discourse that phrases the increasing phobia her state produces in her. Maite's reading of the social is very meaningful in this aspect. She reads the law operating in others, she locates and follows the functioning of the discourse of the law and, at the same time, her text clarifies for the reader how the law operates in her too. Foucault links the discourse of power with the discourse of identity. In this way, power rests on what the subject personifies and performs, on self-observation and reflection of the self on others. At the moment Maite writes, she recognises herself, the woman thinking monologically, as follows,

Treinta años son casi la mitad de una vida
el paso definitivo
corto para los audaces que viven en una carrera de saltos
y excesivamente largo para ciegos temerarios
Treinta años significarán también veintiseis de aprendizaje más tres
de ignorar lo aprendido y uno para convencerse de la equivocación
de proust

Treinta años es todavía pronto para escribir un buen libro tarde
para plantar un naranjo y la ocasión de fecundar una niña que
pueda llamarse copelia
Treinta años será una edad demasiado interesante para agotarla
rápido eligiendo un amante de horas intempestivas (*Pan*, 1979: 84).

The implicit metaliterary reference Maite drops at the moment when she describes herself is worthy of note. Maite touches upon her own position as literary subject and concludes that it is too soon to write a good book. This would justify the production of a text written in the silence of memory, an authorial justification. *Pan de boda* is the text of Maite's silence, dictated by her memory. She has not given herself authority but silence and through a text that happens only in the mind, the text of the psyche, Maite has delineated the process by which she has become hystericized, when pushed beyond the limits of her control of language and affect.

With respect to other texts of its time, Amat's undoubtedly executes a rupture at the level of signifying practice which, from a Kristevan and also Foucauldian perspective, would be symptomatic of broader ruptures at the level of socio-economic relations. The woman narrator in *Pan de boda* textualises her thoughts through the form of a monologue written in poetic form. As Julia Kristeva suggests in her book *La Révolution du langage poétique* (1974), poetic language breaks down not only the restraints imposed by social life and, more precisely, language but it also reinforces these by providing them with a new apparatus. From her perspective, theoretical discourse seeks to show and to understand the way poetic language breaks down and rebuilds social restraints. Still, one might wonder how theoretical discourse can influence the creation of a poetics and whether poetic language or,

rather, a very poetic choice of linguistic expression on the part of an author, can be considered to hide an implicit theoretical agenda. This is the case of *Pan de boda*, an interior monologue in which poetic form exposes the workings of the State, the Law, the Family and ultimately the Masterpiece along with the notion of authority and the authorial voice. The operational impasse of these factors on the formation of the female subject is thus exposed. This line of interpretation would situate the first novel published by Amat at the level of the avant-garde authors analysed by Kristeva, namely Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Bataille and Artaud. Kristeva privileges art in her writings by emphasising the most extreme points of disruption within artistic practices for she regards this as the quintessence of avant-garde. The treatment of the theme of hysteria under a postmodern perspective should have tempted critics to analyse *Pan de boda*, given the significance this theme has retained for feminist scholars for the last two decades.¹¹

Having already stated the representational importance that absent maternal figures are going to have throughout Amat's production, the narrative of Maite's maternity comes as a divergence in respect to other novels where the mother dies or is dead. If there is a theme in this monologue that receives a confessional treatment, it is Maite's pregnancy. She deals with it mixing the confessional within the analytical. Foucault has stated that confession is one of the most precious rituals generated by Western culture for the production of truth and Maite's monologue slides into confession when dealing with the effects being pregnant has on her plans

¹¹ Key feminist analyses in this aspect are, among others: Hunter (1985) and Bernheimer & Kahane (1985).

for the future. There is no mythical view of motherhood. Pregnancy is equated with having a voice inside, hence the similarity with writing activities. Through her discourse, Maite narrates how Roberto sees her as pregnant, what she signifies culturally for him and by extension how misleading that signification is. As a result, she will get him caught in the law he perpetuates and she will be able to achieve agency and face the future as a woman that has reinvented herself. Throughout her text, Maite has been able to locate the discursive sites where the law perpetuates itself, producing power. Although there is no clear indication that she despised matrimony, it is possible to ascertain that, as a product of her time, she was ready to question the social bond this institution represented as the legal destiny for women. And so she did and became aware that she had forfeited ideology and surrendered to the pressure of the law, located in the discourse of her parents, in Roberto's discourse, in the workplace and finally, in herself (*Pan*, 1979: 10-11). *Pan de boda* is a difficult text that resists signification in the same way that Roberto seems unable to make sense out of the hysterical body of his wife although he is the one that most actively participates in the inscription of hysteria onto Maite's body when he qualifies her, and, following Foucault, disqualifies her, as "más intuitiva que lógica" (*Cuerpo*, 1979: 30).

The next section deals with a character who will never be able to become "une Mère, avec son image en négatif qui est la 'femme nerveuse'" (Foucault 1976: 137) and whose acts are advocated to avoid interaction with the Law in the Foucauldian sense of codification of norms and of what is normal. An entirely

different type of subjectivity in a text that closes a narrative cycle. The narrative treatment of a psychiatric pathology, namely hysteria, in *Pan de boda*, results in the exposure and consequent destabilisation of what can be regarded as cultural expectation of gender. Gender unorthodoxy becomes the main theme of *Narciso y Armonía* (1982).

2. NARCISO Y ARMONÍA (1982):

EXPLORING GENDERISATION THROUGH

PARODY AND AMBIGUITY

Et c'est justement au nom de cette intensification de la valeur des *aphrodisia* dans les rapports conjugaux, en raison du rôle qu'on lui attribue dans la communication entre époux, qu'on se met à interroger de façon de plus en plus dubitative les privilèges qui avaient pu être reconnus à l'amour des garçons (Foucault 1984: 216).

Following the exploration of marriage undertaken in *Pan de boda*, Amat publishes a book whose plot, although treating homosexuality, is mainly involved with the problematic genderisation of the two main characters. The appropriation of Foucauldian thought by feminism has focused on two binarisms: sex and sexuality, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, gender and sexuality. Even if it is true that the latter can be read as a Foucauldian blindspot, it cannot be denied that the exploration of the binarism within gender theory has been deeply and justly influenced by Foucault's exploration of the former. Foucault saw sexuality as a power regime that has turned sex into a political category. The tension between sex and gender is never solved in Foucault and that, for gender theorists such as Butler, is his most ostensible problem with feminism.¹² The sexed body and the gendered body do not collide in

¹² On this particular aspect, for further information see "Foucault, Herculine, and the Politics of Sexual Discontinuity" in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Butler 1990: 93-111) and "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification. Between Freud and Foucault" in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Butler 1997: 83-105).

Foucault: the collision will occur elsewhere. However, as was the case with Freud and other male thinkers, Foucault has touched on key feminist issues such as that one, and has therefore spawned a good deal of feminist writing in response. It is in this context that I intend to read Amat's early novels, as a response to theoretical formulations in general, and to Foucault in particular. A parallelism can be drawn between the issues addressed by Foucauldian feminists and the themes treated in *Narciso y Armonía*. This section will firstly offer a reading of Amat's second book along these lines and, secondly, contextualise it within Amat's fiction as the leading point towards Amat's most metaliterary texts, the "libros sin voz" which *Narciso y Armonía* chronologically precedes.

As de Lauretis points out, the Foucauldian concept of sexuality is "perceived as an attribute or property of the male" (1987: 14), regardless of whether it is embodied by male or female. Not giving consideration to embodiment implied not dealing with the materiality of the male body, something Foucault was not interested in doing, being more involved with constructing a conceptual frame for homosexuality and in fixing notions that actually surround the materiality of the body – e.g. *aphrodisia*.¹³ If the materiality of the body had been addressed, then genderisation would have become prominent, as it has become for queer theorists and gender theorists. Amat's characters will always tend to resist in some way or

¹³ In the section entitled "Les plaisirs du mariage" (206-216) from *Histoire de la Sexualité: Le souci de soi* (1984), Foucault uses the notion of *aphrodisia* to move from heterosexual love to "l'amour des garçons", the main theme of "Les garçons", the last chapter of the third and last volume of his history of sexuality. Foucault has gone from "Le corps" (119-169) to "La femme" (171-216) and then to "Les garçons" through an exploration of *aphrodisia* and of the construction of monopolising mechanisms for the deployment of legal uses of pleasure abstracted from literature and philosophy.

other any regulatory practices of signification or meaning production. *Pan de boda* and *Narciso y Armonía* thematise the complex relationship between the material body and society. They are avant-garde insofar as they try to eradicate identity, especially sexual identity by destabilising sex, gender and body. The male characters in *Amat* are non-definitional. Ambiguous, problematic, very often their homosexuality is as stable as their heterosexuality, i.e., not stable at all. In the novel under discussion, there are two instances in which the mirage of stability is reached by paradoxically creating a signifying practice that forecloses destabilisation by enacting ambiguity. In the text, the one that occurs first deals with Armonía's representation as androgynous and the second one has Narciso as its subject and deals with his representation in drag:

[...] se abrieron las cortinas y tras ellas apareció la provocativa figura, despampanante, bella y seductora en extremo, de una mujer. [...] Alta, excitante y que, dueña de sus piernas ocultas por una capa de dorada seda, caminaba de un lado a otro del escenario, acompañando con sus manos, representando con oscilaciones seguras e insultantes de su cuerpo la canción que parecía salir de sus labios.[...]

Reconoció la peluca de suave rizo azabache de su madre. Ahora debería reirse, pero tampoco podía. La visión era demasiado impresionante. Única. Ajena a todo tipo de asociaciones. [...] Armonía quería tocar a esa maravilla. Hombre o mujer; lo que fuera. [...]

—¡Ah...! —se dijo para sí, orgullosa de haber descubierto el truco—, a mí no me engañas. Esas son tus manos, Narciso. Las de siempre, largas, finas, pulcras, viriles, al cabo. Mías. Por mucho tacón que lleves siempre serás Narciso. Tus manos te traicionan, querido.

Mentira. No te engañes, Armonía. En sus manos está precisamente el arte, la gracia, la maravilla. ¡Qué fácil ponerse laca en las uñas! ¡Cuán grosero mostrar las piernas! Hubiera caído en el ridículo. No era un travestí. No, no lo era en modo alguno. Era una mujer, una mujer exótica, y al propio tiempo era Narciso (*Narciso*, 1982: 233-234).

Narciso's impersonation of an ultrafeminine subject whose excessive representation contrasts with the harmonious self Armonía, as her name indicates, perceives herself as, makes evident that the novel *Narciso y Armonía* treats the theme of identity through the exploration of gender. The book is not about male homosexuality, as Romero, Alberdi, Martínez and Zauner (in Durán 1987: 337-357) allege in the collective essay "Feminismo y literatura: la narrativa de los años 70", a piece that gives special consideration to Catalan writers. In the subsection entitled "Erotismo y homosexualidad: lo prohibido", Amat is discussed under a frame that aims to come to grips with the treatment of sexuality carried out by writers such as Tusquets, Moix, Riera and Amat herself, who figures as an unknown writer with just one book, *Narciso y Armonía*. The misunderstanding of the text is phrased as follows:

En *Narciso y Armonía* Nuria Amat trata el tema de la homosexualidad masculina, y aun siendo este el eje de la novela, lo analiza de forma tangencial, se mueve en un terreno vago, pasa por encima como si quemara y lo deja en suspenso. Los problemas de amar a un homosexual parecen reducirse a una competencia entre los protagonistas por ver quién es más bello y coqueto. A pesar de que la mayoría de los personajes son homosexuales, no ahonda en un posible conflicto o en el análisis de las diferencias entre la heterosexualidad y la homosexualidad (1987: 351).

Male homosexuality cannot be considered the axis of the novel precisely because it is not treated as the central theme. Zatlin (1987), the only theorist that has contextualised and also commented Amat's early works, despite realising that the analysis of male homosexuality is "tangencial", ignores the analysis of the issues that are central to the plot, namely the destabilisation of sex, gender and body through the exploration of ambiguity and its influence on the relationship between sex and

identity. “Los problemas de amar a un homosexual” cannot be read as a theme either. It is not even present as such in the discourse of the novel and is therefore not related to the protagonists’ attitude towards the embellishment of their bodies and their need for beauty. Homosexuality (and heterosexuality) interests Amat in the same way it interests writers of queer theory and gender theorists, as part of a continuum and not as a fixed identity. Zatlin is not aware of this and that is why he considers the book lacks an analysis of the conflict or differences between homosexuality and heterosexuality. It is Narciso’s masculinity, and not his homosexuality or momentary bisexuality, which can be questioned in the same way that the masculinity of the father in *La intimidación*, and also of the father and the brother in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, can be questioned. Narciso’s sense of aesthetics, his elegance and beauty have to be interpreted as a result of the gender awareness the author is developing. If it is read as a consequence of the existence of an awareness in the process of development, then it follows that the text is attempting to expose gender and therefore exhibits sites where sex, gender and the body can be destabilised. Basing her assumptions on an interpretation and analysis of Foucault’s *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la Prison* (1975), Judith Butler states that

The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities. [...] The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of “woman” [...], it also

reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself –as well as its contingency* (1990: 137).

In later works, Butler will situate herself between Freud and Foucault, at an epistemological point similar to the one that conditions the process of subject development in *Pan de boda* and that led Amat to explore drag and androgyny as sexual stylizations of bodies that would otherwise resist signification or, rather, signify ambiguity.¹⁴ Drag and cross-dressing are part not only of Narciso's sexual stylization and, furthermore, subjectivisation but also of Armonía's. As is the case with Nena Rocamora in *El país del alma*, the issue at stake in the characterisation of characters with a problematic gender identity is not exactly the "notion of an original or primary gender identity" but actually the alienating results of a deeply imbued genderisation in a state of continual enactment and foreclosure due to its citational nature. Zatlin suggests that on one level, the book might be read as a "parody of the female quest as outlined by Annis Pratt" (1987: 34). However, Armonía's search for matrilineal roots, given the fact that she cannot recover the mother she loved and killed in a water ski accident, is absent from the narration. It is the absence of the female quest as outlined by Annis Pratt that conditions Armonía's idealisation of

¹⁴ About the relationship between gender, feminism and Foucault, Butler writes:

[...] what Foucault describes as the full siege and invasion of that body by the signifying practices of the prison –namely, inspection, confession, the regularization and normalization of bodily movement and gesture, the disciplinary regimes of the body which have led feminists to consult Foucault in order to elaborate the disciplinary production of gender (1997: 84-85).

androgyny, developed as a result of having had her Fallopian tubes tied. In Zatlin's words,

At times reminiscent of Tusquets in its elegant style, erotic descriptions, and use of Freudian symbolism, Amat's novel raises the interesting question of whether a dance cummermaid can find true happiness with a gay male. Inspired by her infatuation for Narciso –and finding her image reflected in his– Armonía overcomes her mermaid phase to embody the ideal androgyny. With Narciso's help, she creates a dance in which she is both Daphnis and Chloe. Armonía initiates Narciso in the joys of heterosexual love. But Amat both creates and destroys her myths. Ultimately Narciso finds himself reflected in another man, and, in spite of the local legends of a disillusioned Armonía who disappeared into the sea and became a mermaid, the real Armonía gives up ballet, marries a solid citizen, and becomes a provincial housewife (1987: 34).

The only obvious similarity between Tusquets and Amat is the monumentalisation of the sea, a feature critics consider common to female writers of the so-called "Catalan Women's Renaissance".¹⁵ The feature that separates this book from all other texts by Amat is the treatment of the materiality of the body, central theme of this text. There lies the parodical dimension of the two characters. Narciso's appearance in drag turns femininity (as gender identity and gender performance) into parody. The signification culturally ascribed to anatomical sex becomes in turn destabilised. It is in this direction that Amat is making an effort towards signification. Armonía is the only female character whose body is explained as matter. Narciso's relationship with Armonía does not satisfy him and he clearly states from the beginning that, in spite of loving her, there will always be the possibility of his wanting someone else. That someone else will not be another woman, it will be a man.

¹⁵ See Susanna (1988). Catalan writers' innovative feminist *raison d'être* has been acknowledged by critics like Manteiga or McKerney (both in Manteiga, Galerstein & McKerney 1988).

It is possible and accurate to claim that overdescription is used as a textual space for problematic genderisation. All novels by Amat, and this is a feature which *La intimidad* (1997) and *El país del alma* (1999) will repeat, expose the need to cross generic boundaries or to create signification by avoiding them. The desire for subjectivity the characters sustain is also a desire to be unique from the point of view of gender. And *Narciso y Armonía* does not deal with gender in a subliminal way, as is the case in *El país del alma* (1999), but in a direct form. From this perspective, it aims to deal more clearly with aspects that are theoretically relevant for Amat's narrative poetics. Thus, Narciso, when inscribing the myth of Daphnis and Chloe in Armonía, aims to represent in her "[...] un ser andrógino, [...] una diosa llamada Armonía cuyo mito consistiría en la representación de una ambigüedad creativa, genética, fisiológica" (*Narciso*, 1982: 140):

Sentado en el suelo, junto a los pies de su musa [...] pinta, en realidad, la efigie de su propia persona, la de Narciso en Armonía y la de Armonía en Narciso. De esa cara situada en los límites del sexo, dividida en dos, como su traje, como su historia-fábula, como ella misma (*Narciso*, 1982: 141).

Female dandies, deficient learners of femininity, women whose bodies are removed from representation and avoid being gendered, in a nutshell, gender unorthodoxy does become consolidated in Amat. It does not fully signify yet. However, the books published between *Narciso y Armonía* and *La intimidad* will theorise the components that sustain the configuration of gender identity and, of course, gender unorthodoxy: sex, sexuality, the body, the *psyche*, desire. As opposed to English, the usage in the

Spanish language, and also in criticism written in Spanish, of the term feminine appears to be much more essentialised than in English where the distinction between female and feminine and the separate use of both has influenced the development of gender studies and recent feminist writing.¹⁶

Playing with gender, trying, experimenting is something Amat will always do and that is what *Narciso y Armonía* ultimately is: a conscious act of playing with gender. However, in this case, the conscious playing with gender has no unconscious element at all. The myth of Narcissus and the myth of Adonis merge in the characterisation of the male protagonist of the novel. As Narcissus, he is in love with his self-image. But that does not make him any different from Armonía. As Adonis, he dies and resurrects repeatedly, goes into the underworld and afterwards emerges majestically as seducer. His last act of emergence is not, however, majestic. This is also the way in which Amat analyses the myth of Adonis in *Monstruos*. In this analysis of Adonis, the name of Foucault appears:

Existen tantas leyendas de Adonis como Adonis haya. Es conocida de él su promiscuidad nocturna y diurna. ¿Hay quienes se preguntan por qué los Adonis necesitan amar así? Hay también quienes debieran preguntarse por qué no les está permitido a los Adonis amarse de éste o de cualquier otro modo. En el amor son cazadores furtivos o presas cogidas en su trampa. Ésta fue la venganza de Zeus con Adonis, la de imponerle el deseo hacia seres de su propio sexo. [...]

Shakespeare, Proust, Gide, Platón lo escribieron.

El destino de Adonis está encerrado en una u otra catástrofe. Los mártires siempre resucitan y más cuando su castigo es morir por culpa de haber amado tanto. La última ha sido si cabe más terrible y fulminante. No es un secreto.

¹⁶ Examples of the use of the term "feminine" as an overarching adjective to describe female writing abound. See, for example, Ballesteros (1994), Dávila Gonçalves (1999), Fagundo (1995) and López de Martínez (1995). There are also exceptions, such as Bergmann (1987) or Gascón Vera (1992). In 1996, Marcela Lagarde publishes *Género y feminismo* in an attempt to reverse this trend and bring gender awareness to a wider critical audience. Her book was published in the "Cuadernos inacabados" series by the feminist press "horas y HORAS. La editorial". Her text has, unfortunately, remained on the critical periphery, as Amat would put it, and is never cited.

[...] Mueren mis amigos (Julio, Luis, Jordi, Alejandro...), mueren mis maestros (Foucault, Jaime Gil de Biedma, Chatwin...), mueren mis amantes... (*Monstruos*, 1990: 97-98).

Narciso, in the book, is also defined by his “promiscuidad nocturna y diurna”, a promiscuity that restricts itself to homosexual affairs. Amat is not the only theorist who seems to regard Foucault as a critical Adonis, doomed to a catastrophic end.¹⁷ The relationship between literary creation and forms of undefined illnesses, or “locura” as Amat tends to call it, becomes crucial in the characterisation of the protagonists of Amat’s recent novels.¹⁸ *Narciso y Armonía* can be regarded as a logical stage in this representational evolution. Ultimately, the body of the characters is not enough to determine their actions. The use of literary material in the text diverges from the metaliterary usage that consolidates itself in *La intimidación* and *El país del alma*. In the text being discussed, Amat uses myth but does not literarise the characters. Armonía’s androgyny is just anchored in physical, material facts: clothes, attitude, sterilisation and, ultimately, this cannot lead to a literary end but to an integration of the character into the social, the level of signification that will be

¹⁷ References to the relationship between death and sex are scattered throughout Foucault’s production. They become a leit-motiv of Miller’s controversial biography, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (1993).

¹⁸ In *Monstruos*, the unfairness of AIDS is expressed in relation to the unfairness of a punishment undeservedly received by those who desire “seres de su propio sexo”. The “la última” Amat refers to is the last illness that has held back the exposure of genderisation and its differentiation from sexual identity, a view shared by Butler (1997), Dollimore (1998), Sontag (1991). As Sontag states

The age-old, seemingly inexorable process whereby diseases acquire meanings (by coming to stand for the deepest fears) and inflict stigma is always worth challenging, and it does seem to have more limited credibility in the modern world, among people willing to be modern – the process is under surveillance now. With this illness, one that elicits so much guilt and shame, the effort to detach it from these meanings, these metaphors, seems particularly liberating, even consoling. But just abstaining from them cannot distance the metaphors. They have to be exposed, criticized, belabored, used up (Sontag 1991 [1988]: 179).

displaced in *La intimidad*, where androgyny will be the result of the literary characterisation of a narrator who endlessly explores literature. Their story leaves both Narciso and Armonía “ill”. She will recover from her depression in order to slide into domestic normality but Narciso will not. It is interesting to contrast Sontag’s statement with what Amat writes in *Letra herida*, a line of argument that results from her own narrative and critical exploration, started in the early novels, continued in the “libros sin voz”, of the workings of illness and/or “locura” in the emergence of the literary subject in the real, i.e., as author. The influence of Sontag is acknowledged:

Si la tuberculosis fue entendida como la enfermedad de la angustia, el sida es la enfermedad del sexo. Ambas atacan a seres indefensos, morían, mueren, especialmente, los espíritus selectos. A ambas se las trata con el encierro, la marginación. Es el sida una forma atroz y terminal de exilio. Son los enfermos del sida, como los tuberculosos en su tiempo, unas criaturas descuidadas, sensibles y sujetas a pasiones desbordantes y promiscuas. Así continúan pensando quienes tratan a los enfermos de sida como seres apestados. El *sidoso*, como en otro tiempo el tuberculoso, es un marginado por partida doble: por su enfermedad (el pánico vergonzante al contagio, igual que Kafka, los otros Kafkas tienen la sexualidad proscrita) o por las peculiaridades de carácter que –se dice– suelen tener las víctimas del sida, espíritus desterrados y atormentados que eligieron la marginación como forma de supervivencia. El escritor, criatura rebelde y marginada, por excelencia, un autocontaminado por convencimiento, de uno u otro modo debe dejar de escribir como ha callado para siempre toda una generación de escritores (Chatwin, Foucault, Gil de Biedma, Cardín, Guibert, Brodkey, Sarduy...) muerta en su mejor momento productivo.

[...] Kafka, Sarajevo, sida son, es verdad, conceptos metafóricos cargados de alegorismo. Metáforas que «denotan las vastas deficiencias de nuestra cultura, la falta de profundidad de nuestro modo de encarar la muerte» (Sontag). Falta de profundidad también en nuestro modo de enfrentar la escritura.

Kafka, Sarajevo, sida: la solución no es tanto el suicidio sino su opción. Como Kafka cuando dice: «Si eres capaz de asesinarte, en cierto sentido ya no estás obligado a ello». Algo semejante puede aplicarse a la escritura: si eres capaz de no escribir, en cierto sentido ya no estás obligado a ello (*Letra*, 1998: 79-80).

The option of suicide was present in the mind of “la lectora” at the end of *Todos somos Kafka*. The importance of suicide, death and “locura” in Amat’s fiction has to be related to the importance of marginal spaces. And the same applies to Amat’s interpretation of the relationship between literary production and AIDS, “la enfermedad del sexo”, a contemporary “Casa de Atrás” that, being historically and literarily significant, has to form part of the historical account of the literature of the end of the millennium. The relationship between writing and rebelliousness, which will be analysed in the third and last section of this chapter, is present already in Amat’s first published novel, although in a very subtle way because it is not the most relevant aspect of the narrator’s self-awareness. Aspects related to gender identity are crucial in the textual construction of Maite, the narrator of *Pan de boda*, Narciso and Armonía, main characters of Amat’s second published novel and it has to be remembered that this chapter explores the way in which the texts mentioned above expose the almost inevitable genderisation characters are supposed to undergo. If AIDS can be understood as “la enfermedad del sexo”, hysteria and other forms of apparent female “locura” are the “enfermedades del género”, as it were.

In order to fully ascertain the weight of gender awareness in Amat and its influence on the literary *bildung* of the female voice, it is pertinent to point out that in 1979, the year in which *Pan de boda* was published, Amat published an article entitled “La erótica del lenguaje en Alejandra Pizarnik y Monique Wittig”. This article, like the other books considered in the present chapter, has to be read as a text of a novelist who is young and is starting to publish. There are debatable points in

Amat's first published literary essay, but what is relevant is the fact that there was gender awareness already then, as can be ascertained from Amat's conclusion: "El género es la mujer" (1979: 52). According to Lagarde, this type of identification is rooted in the influence of essentialism in activities of critical reading (1996: 22), an influence feminists, and also Amat, have overcome with time. Also with time, identifying gender with woman leads to deadly representation in Amat in the form of dead mothers –*La intimidación*, *Todos somos Kafka*, *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*– or the mother's journey to death –*El país del alma*–. Wittig was one of the first feminist and also gay authors who explored the genderisation of language and additionally the production of the gendered subject through linguistic internalisation and posterior enactment of gender strategies. The clearly defined gender awareness shown by Amat in recent works is echoed in the treatment of female psychic alienation displayed in these early novels.¹⁹

From a literary perspective, Hutcheon (1980) and Waugh (1984) had already acknowledged the return to an exploration of the personal in their studies of

¹⁹ Amat has a very clear opinion in this respect, which may help to account for her absence from literary classifications

[...] si me preguntas sobre la voz interna de los géneros pienso firmemente que en toda mujer (cuanto menos en las que a mi me interesan) hay una parte de masculinidad y otra de feminidad. Me horroriza todo lo convencionalmente masculino o femenino. Al propio tiempo, también sé que hay una diferencia notoria entre ser hombre o ser mujer [...] desde el punto de vista de los personajes. En cuanto a si escribo como hombre o como mujer es algo que he dejado de plantearme desde hace muchos años. [...] en tanto que escritora siempre he caminado de por libre. He sido muy solitaria en este sentido. Cuando tocaba "escribir como una mujer" no lo hacía. Y no digamos lo contrario. La voz de la escritura es neutra. Ahora bien, creo que la mujer, por sus cualidades de género, ha sido la marginada de la historia. Esto nos ha dado ventajas y miles de inconvenientes. El machismo persiste. Y no digamos en literatura. Mi escritura es también un arma de lucha contra este poder varonil. Pero como toda arma creativa esta pelea debe quedar entre líneas. Sugerir no mostrar (from personal correspondence with Nuria Amat, 14/5/1999).

metafiction and self-conscious fiction at the beginning of the eighties. These two postmodern fictional modes (discussed as metaliterature and self-reflexivity) will be separately developed throughout Amat's literary production until they get closely connected in Amat's latest novels forming what one may regard as a passionate attachment in *La intimidación. Narciso y Armonía* can be read as a proof that Amat, like the gender theorists, did not monumentalise Foucault.

3. EARLY NOVELS: ABJECTED TEXTS OR

THE DOOR TOWARDS METALITERARY REPRESENTATION?

«Se escribe para ser otra cosa que aquello que uno es», dijo Foucault. Se escribe para disimular la voluntad suicida. Se escribe para olvidar que tras un escritor hay un suicida. Pero las palabras engañan y, al final de tanto jugar y distraerse con ellas, terminan provocando un accidente (*Letra*, 1998: 20).

In one of her most recent publications, Butler (1997), after having criticised the lack of exploration of the psyche in Foucault's writing, enters into a quest for a suppressed psychoanalytical dimension. As she sees it, Foucault deals with the body only in order to make it disappear from his discourse: "the subject appears at the expense of the body" (Butler 1997: 91). What matters is not the body, but power, discipline, regulation in the form of regimes such as matrimony or the family unit, or in the form of sites whose role is depicted as regulatory, such as the hospital or the school. Finding the unconscious presence of psychoanalysis in his writing is a movement compared to finding the influence of gender in Freud's writing. The psychoanalytic vocabulary of sublimation Butler traces in Foucault shares points of contact with the type of discourse exhibited in Amat's early novels. Maite's discourse is a poetic interior monologue, the tone displayed by the omniscient narrator in *Narciso y Armonía* sublimates the physical beauty of the bodies of the two protagonists by characterising them through the use of myth (Daphne and Chloe,

Adonis, Narcissus...). The reference to Foucault quoted above shows how Amat has read him, and on what grounds he has influenced her: identity and writing.

The blindspot Butler signals in Foucault's writings on the configuration of the subject is his reluctance to deal with the psyche itself. As a result, the configuration of the psyche is present in Butler's interpretation of theories of subject formation. And Amat, although deeply influenced by Foucault, forces her narrators and characters to talk psychically about their subject positions thus presenting an ultimate act of subordination as a self-made promise and guarantee of existence. Maite is able to exploit the vulnerability socially produced for her as a pregnant woman to her own advantage. As Butler states,

precisely at the moment when choice is impossible, the subject pursues subordination as the promise of existence. This pursuit is not choice, but neither it is necessity. Subjection exploits the desire for existence, where existence is always conferred elsewhere; it marks a primary vulnerability to the Other in order to be (1997: 20-21).

Butler's quest for a suppressed psychoanalytical dimension in Foucault can be related to Maite's discourse. Consequently, it becomes viable to corroborate Maite's endeavour to phrase and expose a dimension that, as related to the mental condition called hysteria, would normally be suppressed from discourse. Narrating her marital self precisely at the moment when she does it, i.e. "precisely at the moment when choice is impossible", has to be read as an act of promise of existence to the self. And for herself, though silently addressing Roberto, she writes:

Tengo ganas de conseguir cuanto deseo te callo
[...]
Estoy sólo aparentemente inválida
Juego a la pata coja mientras pedaleo con dos pies (*Pan*, 1979: 106).

In order to regain her freedom, she realises that she has to use an argumentation that others can understand as belonging to “los disparatados parajes de la locura” (*Pan*, 1979: 107). Elsewhere in *Letra herida*, Amat writes that “[...] el loco, dicen, es una escritura sin obra” (*Letra*, 1998: 13). The relationship between what one might perceive as “locura” and “escritura” or literary creation will condition the development of the plots of *La intimidad* and *El país del alma*. This is also treated in *Viajar es muy difícil* and *Todos somos Kafka*. In interview (Barcelona, 18/6/1999), Amat expressed her profound dislike for *Narciso y Armonía* in what can be considered an overcritical reaction that, nevertheless, must command respect. Even if one agrees with her when affirming that the book is not her best piece, it is a very revealing part of her evolution. Amat considers *Pan de boda* and *Narciso y Armonía* as “novelas de juventud en las que apostaba por un tono personal porque aún no había encontrado la voz. Encontré la voz en *La intimidad*”. This view puts forward the idea that these texts can be regarded as abjected, given the willingness of the author to suppress them from her literary evolution by neglecting to mention them, in the same way as she avoids referring to her books on librarianship. However, as abjected texts that precede the publication of the “libros sin voz” they can also be interpreted as the door towards metaliterary representation, since the most striking difference between them and Amat’s recent novels is the absence of a metaliterary

dimension. According to this argument, Amat lacked, as a young novelist, the metaliterary representation that was going to characterise her as author in the future. She was, quite naturally, blind to the future of her literary-subjectivity. In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997) and also in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Texts* (1993), Butler approaches female writers and female-authored texts. Because her main hypothesis is that “speech [and, in the same way, literature] is always in some ways out of our control” (1997: 15), she agrees with Toni Morrison that the woman writer is blind to the signification of her own language:

the writer is blind to the future of the language in which she writes. Thus language is thought of ‘mostly as agency’, distinguished from forms of mastery or control, on the one hand, and by the closure of system on the other (1997: 8).

The reason why Maite leaves Roberto is not simply her pregnancy. She leaves him because she wants to write. The future of her agency, whatever that may be, lies in the text. She believes that in order to create literarily, the most desirable choice, the best literary-subject position will be the one reached after distancing herself from the essentialisation culturally communicated by her body. On the other hand, it can be claimed that *Narciso y Armonía* is a work conscious of its literariness insofar as, through interpretation, it incorporates classical myths into the narrative. However, this does not result in an exploitation of the desire for literary existence on the part of the characters, a feature that separates the text from the other novels by Amat. In *Pan de boda*, the desire to write and to exercise a literary activity conditions Maite’s

development and final state of awareness. From this perspective, it can be said that hysteria related gender and genre. The promise and desire of existence should be identified as a desire for representation. Maite's words place it also elsewhere, in silence. The metafictional dimension the treatment of the 'I' will have in later works by Amat could therefore be understood thus: if "desire", and therefore representation, is always conferred elsewhere, then literature bids the subject an endless sphere in which to become, i.e., momentarily be. Maite states,

porque sueño
 porque invento
 porque vivo
 porque el tiempo la experiencia los golpes que da la vida
 porque con mis manos infantiles construyo castillos de arena
 y con mis ojos de adulta los aplasto con los pies
 porque cuando estoy frente a los otros siempre me callo a mí misma
 porque decirlo te supone el compromiso de mostrar obras completas
 o pruebas de principiante (*Pan*, 1979: 112).

Do the final lines of the book cited above indicate that she is a secret novelist? From what she is thinking, it would be possible to conclude that to state that she writes, thus revealing her secret, is not feasible unless she shows her texts. Her texts belong to a young voice that labels herself with the same label the text would formally deserve: poetic,

muchas veces te etiquetas con el rango de poeta
 porque decirlo no supone el compromiso
 la acechante devoción
 de mostrar obras completas o pruebas de principiante
 como sí sería el caso si te llamaras pintora escultora novelista
 porque decirlo produce un grato sabor a humano
 un dulce complejo de artista
 porque decirlo no impone deber de escribir un verso o declamar una poesía

es suficiente

pensar en voz inconclusa
en suspiros de novicio
en presagios de alcahueta
en ritmo de casta consagración
en lenguaje de sublime prostituta

[...]

porque decirlo significa que entre todas las opciones regaladas
cuando niña tú elegirías sin duda la del color de poeta
a pesar de que poesía se escriba siempre sin h
(regla uno del prontuario gramático)
y por ese motivo
por una simple cuestión de norma aprendida con tenazas
hoy no estés capacitada para dinamitar los signos
de palabras con entrañas
de sonidos con suturas
de pesares con mordazas
de cuerpos con una gran dosis de revolución vibrátil

[...]

y porque al fin y al cabo decirlo
no implica nada de nada
porque quien nunca fue poeta que tire la primera piedra (*Pan*, 1979: 31-32).

This lengthy quotation puts forward the idea that, as opposed to poetic forms of discourse, the language of literary fiction appears to be the site on which the possibility of expectation is not destroyed, as opposed to normal speech acts: expectation is aborted by the threat of violence. Literature can then be regarded as the field in which the female subject can reproduce but also challenge her position as object of violence and can only experiment with different ways of voicing the self. As an example of what Ciplijauskaitė, following Christa Wolf, terms “la nueva subjetividad” (1988: 26) or objective subjectivity, Maite’s words are influenced by Roberto’s discourse on her: “se suma a ello el teorema que define a las mujeres según coordenadas distintas [Maite’s observation] y tú definitivamente eres más

intuitiva que lógica [Roberto's words] (1979: 30).²⁰ As Foucauldian literary-subject, Maite, in Amat's words, would be "una escritura sin obra" (*Letra*, 1998: 13). From the perspective outlined so far, both the characters of *Narciso y Armonía* and the narrator of *Pan de boda* show what Randolph Pope regards as autobiographical selves:

The I never stands alone in autobiography but is instead determined by a fragile and shifting series of complementary positions. The I of the autobiographical narrator points, however imperfectly, to the author as he or she writes and confronts the I of the character, who stands for the author in the remembered past, separated by the gap that writing recalls and tries to bridge (in Brownlow & Kronik 1998: 26).

Amat implicitly puts forward the idea that these texts are the periphery of her literary evolution. As such, the autobiographical I's of these first two texts pointed to the theoretical preoccupations of the author, concerns expressed in *Narciso y Armonía*. Amat's early works of fiction insinuate cultural strangeness on the part of the author with respect to her contemporaries and privilege questions of female subjectivity and its relationship with sexuality. In this context, sexuality has to be understood in the Foucauldian sense, as a real historical formation that gave rise to the notion of sex, sexuality speculatively influencing the operation of sex.

²⁰ This statement does not contain a high level of textual violence. However, textual violence is related to the interpretation Maite makes of the social. It also finds expression in the reproduction of Roberto's discourse. In this way, it is possible to find his words merged with hers thus creating violent results:

sino porque en nuestro caso es lógico repartirnos los deberes domésticos
en dos netas divisiones
el que lucha por el pan
y la que se jode para comérselo (*Pan*, 1979: 39).

Brown isolates the influence of gender and, in accordance with gender analysts such as Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis or Myra Jehlen, states that

Unique gender-based literary qualities are unquestionably evident in the work of women writers of Spain (as elsewhere). These differences are most striking in the areas of characters and themes. It is much more difficult to establish the influence of gender on novelistic structure, despite the efforts of French theorists to link anatomy and technique,²¹ or on language (with the exception of women's reported speech) (1991: 21).

Unfortunately, she falls into contradiction when affirming that in the breadth of their range, and also in their affinities with male writers of each era, these eminent Spanish women authors suggest that gender is secondary to the writer's historical moment and individual experience as a basis for literary direction (Brown 1991: 21). *Narciso y Armonía* proves that gender is not secondary to the writer's historical moment, let alone to the writer's act of creating and writing. Maite actually manages to use femininity to her advantage. And her choice of conduct can only be understood from a critical perspective of gender awareness. Amat's article "La erótica del lenguaje en Alejandra Pizarnik y Monique Wittig", like *Pan de boda* and *Narciso y Armonía*, has to be read as a text written by a young voice. There are debatable issues in Amat's first published essay but there is one very short sentence that has to be brought to the fore: "El género es la mujer" (1979: 52). In the next chapter, it will become apparent how gender and abjection become related in the construction of the female subjects undertaken in Amat's most recent novels.

²¹ As far as characterisation is concerned, making a dialectical effort to link anatomy and technique is tantamount to establishing a correlation between gender and genre.

Pan de boda finished with a narrator who wanted to write. In *Narciso y Armonía*, all the symbolism used to construct the main female character is left behind in the end when she marries and changes drastically her artistic life. In the former novel, the narrator wanted a literary role for her future; in the latter, literarisation is abandoned even by the omniscient voice. Armonía's androgyny fails because it was constructed in the Real, where she did not manage to sustain it. Her sterilised body was not enough to essentialise her as androgynous. In the case of Maite, she becomes aware that the pervasiveness of the essentialisation culturally communicated by her body cannot be evaded in the Real but may be so in the space of the text. It could be concluded that both novels advocate the need for a strong symbolic and/ or literary element through which female literary-subjectivity can be explored further. In this way, the social has to be displaced as main sphere of representation, not in order to disappear but in order to be literarised, i.e. in order to have a literary status through the use of intertextuality and self-reflexivity. The challenge to gender and genre is thus posed.

CHAPTER 2

La intimidad (1997) AND *El país del alma* (1999):

THE DISPLACEMENT OF THE SOCIAL AND ITS LITERARIZATION

1. LA INTIMIDAD: MELANCHOLIA AND ANDROGYNY.

(IN)COHERENT FEMALE VOICE AND METALITERARY TISSUE

[Acerca de] esta escritura andrógina... He mirado hacia adentro y he buscado quién escribe. [...] no es un hombre ni tampoco una mujer. La voz, mi voz, no tiene sexo. La voz es sexo. [...] Tal vez la buena literatura esté más allá de los sexos y géneros humanos. Tal vez la buena literatura es buena precisamente porque su escritura está más allá del sexo (Amat, 4/1/2000).

La intimidad can be generically defined as a novel of apprenticeship narrated in the first-person by a female voice contaminated by literature, the sphere of representation that will give her the keys to reach awareness, understand her subjectivity and create a text. Her text can also be defined as melancholic and her voice as tending towards androgyny. The previous chapter finished with an ideal of failed androgyny. When Amat comes back to the novelistic genre, intentionally or unintentionally, she writes androgyny again or, rather, androgyny, as signified, is reached through metaliterary discourse. In this case, therefore, it will be a literarized

process and not a consolidated act inscribed on the body as was the case with Armonía.

The epigraph above expresses the author's opinion about the androgynous nature of her narrators. It has to be remembered that she also regards *La intimidación* as the book that consolidated her literary-subjectivity. In a way, this implies a certain control, in the sense of knowledge and understanding, of the subjectivisation processes written for her narrators, arguably, a type of literary maturity that had not been achieved yet in the novels analysed in the previous chapter. As demonstrated by the agenda underlying the exploration of different theories of subject formation undertaken by Butler in her book *The Psychic Life of Power*, subjection ultimately "signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject" (1997: 2). When Butler deals with subjectivisation, her very extensive exploration of what she characterises as individual 'subjection' is made relevant, especially when she places herself between Freud and Foucault. An account of individual subjection can also be considered to be the main theme of any novel of apprenticeship. If subjectivisation is considered as the process by and through which the individual emerges as subject, i.e., agent of individual signification production, then, as she states, subjection will consist "precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency" (1997: 2). From this perspective, the subject can never *be*, the subject can only *become*, and any unitary conceptualisation will only be a submission to the logic of the one.

Amat's subjects are never unitary. The failure of integration of the real unitary subject postulated by critics such as Butler is, then, taken to the extreme in *La intimidación* due to the subject's destruction: a suicide in the present that mirrors a suicide which occurred in the past or maybe, metaphorically, they are both just one and the same death. From this perspective, it could be argued that suicide does not imply in this case the death of the female subject, this interpretation being symbolically regulated by the circular structure of the book: finally, narrating a female subject implies storycising a permanent site of contest and, on the other hand, representation remains in literature not as a finding but as an infinite variety of possibilities. Nevertheless, it could also be stated that, sadly, in the case of the novel, the conceptualisation of the female subject is still a failure because the narrator fails to sustain the act of becoming in the sense postulated by Butler.

Her failure, though, happens within the literary. The "afán metaliterario" is never absent in the novel and becomes the constant element in which the "intimidación" of the main narrative voice occurs. The book is the story of a woman called Nuria. Her name is only revealed at the very end of the novel. The narration of her existence is profoundly inspired by the death of her mother and the Sunday visits to her grave, the psychiatric hospital situated in front of her bedroom, and the library of her father. The absence of the mother and the omnipresence of the father's canonical library symbolically and textually sustain the metaliterariness of her discourse. In literature, she sees that, when reading as a woman, she cannot be presupposed in the same way that a good reader will not presuppose the identity of the female subject. How to

make sense of representation is the essence of her quest, a quest related to the death of the mother. Butler states that

The identity of the feminist subject ought not to be the foundation of feminist politics, if the formation of the subject takes place within a field of power regularly buried through the assertion of that formulation. Perhaps, paradoxically, 'representation' will be shown to make sense for feminism only when the subject of 'women' is nowhere presumed (1990: 16).

In *La intimidación*, the woman subject that is always presumed, except by the narrator, is the figure of the dead mother. When visiting the mother's grave, the only character that wants to see the deceased as a question mark full of possibilities is the narrator who compares the grave to an open book she can endlessly read (*Intimidación*, 1997: 45). The finished version of the character given to her by others is full of silences. However, by seeing the mother as something to be read repeatedly, something metaliterary, she turns her into a subject that can never and nowhere be presumed:

Las novelas eran como espejos del recuerdo. En ellas me veía o no me veía, según fuera el capricho del más allá de mi pobre madre. Las novelas me contaban el silencio de la muerte de mi madre.

La locura, por ejemplo.

La locura era la novela, mi madre, y la loca de Jane Eyre. Mi segundo libro de cabecera.

Mi padre, sin embargo, nunca tuvo ese libro en su biblioteca, cosa que entonces me parecía sospechosa, dado que en la biblioteca paterna estaban, se decía, todos los libros fundamentales de la literatura.

Así que mi madre nunca había podido leer esa novela. O quizá Jane Eyre fuese la novela escondida de la vida y muerte de mi madre (*Intimidación*, 1997: 50).

Her first "libro de cabecera" in childhood is *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1868-69), a book that belonged to her mother and becomes, for the narrator, not

only part of the mother's possessions but also a novel written by the mother because "mis ojos confundían aún autora y propietaria. Yo iba a leer una novela de mi madre" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 47). "De mi madre" signifies more than one type of possession, indicates more than one type of subjectivity. Like the feminist subject postulated by Butler, Nuria has an inexhaustible capacity for looking for reflexivity in analyses of literature but because she, the narrator, constructs herself as a product of fiction, her subjectivity cannot be sustained outside it, hence her compulsive reading and writing. The narrator is a writer without a real biography; in other words, with a biography made of fictional substance, and, as was alleged in *Todos somos Kafka*, "manicomios" are places where writers without a biography are kept (*Todos*, 1993: 151). That is why she ends up in the psychiatric clinic. However, it is precisely this never finding herself coherently represented, i.e. never being able to sustain agency in the real for long enough to satisfy the momentary desire to be, that causes the narrator to be primarily a melancholic subject with a perpetually unsatisfied desire for representation perpetuating this melancholy. It can therefore be argued that the feminist dimension of her portrayal is also melancholic and that melancholy is ultimately what frames her subjectivity.

The narrator's self-representation can ultimately be considered as an ontological game between disrupted ordinary perception of insanity and metaliterature. The coherence the narrator gives to her narrative discourse can be defined as the possibility of eternalising the desire for representation –in the sense of subjection or subject construction– within the apparent chaos of a narration told and

constructed from a metaliterary perspective. The linear rendering of time is left out, and in this way the reader loses the possibility of isolating a present of awareness that would explain the origin of the narration, the place and the time from which Nuria writes. To narrate herself and feel herself explicit or, rather, to apprehend a state of narrated coherence as a female voice that explores the self in literature turns out to be impossible unless psychological incoherence is interpreted as metaliterary coherence, as a possibility of interpretation of the female voice among many others within the production of a text and within the existence of literature.

Judith Butler postulates the self-reflexive approach to the formulation of a politics. In her case, this results in a rationale that summons a certain theory of textuality to the scene; indeed, “a certain intertextual writing that might well generate wholly different epistemic maps” (Butler, in Nicholson 1997: 301). In Amat, the metaliterary is intertextual on the one hand, and self-reflexive on the other. Metaliterature is marked by an active engagement with literary tradition in the genesis of the text. In this aspect, Amat’s approach can definitely be considered as feminist. It can never presume a female subject and uses literature to construct precisely that. Narrating the search for truth and knowledge is the quest that defines the *bildungsroman* genre and this is present in the book. The search for truth and knowledge is additionally a search for identity in literature, the domain of endless possibilities of self-reflection:

En los libros aparecían todas las posibilidades de la muerte y de la vida. Los abría y descifraba sus páginas como si fueran pótimas para el descubrimiento de la verdad (*Intimidad*, 1997: 78).

The circular motion established between critical writing and the love of reading is, of course, a Barthesian move, and one which *Letra herida* and *La intimidación* develop repeatedly. *La intimidación* can be considered as the most innovative narrative proposal formulated by Amat. In the book, the union between the subjectivity of the narrator and the literary matter is sustained throughout, subordinated to the existence of a plot. There are, however, other possible female writers and other possibilities of female authorial voice, namely the other female writers of El Maresme. All of them are, for the narrator, “la exageración de algo” (*Intimidación*, 1997: 125). This observation coincides with the Freudian view of pathology as a magnification and exaggeration of the norm.

In the case of the narrator, “el idioma de la no madre” (*Intimidación*, 1997: 97) she considers she speaks is not by exclusion the language of the father, but rather the language of a melancholic subject writing melancholic discourse. As has already been mentioned, Butler implicitly gives a metaliterary dimension to melancholia when relating gender acquisition to it:

Melancholia does not name a psychic process that might be recounted through an adequate explanatory scheme. [...] our ability to refer to the psyche through tropes of internality are themselves effects of a melancholic condition. Melancholia produces a set of spatializing tropes for psychic life, domiciles of preservation and shelter as well as arenas for struggle and persecution. Such tropes do not “explain” melancholia: they constitute some of its fabular discursive effects (1997: 171).

From this perspective, the text is an effect of melancholia. However, there is another discursive effect: “la voz”. “La voz” is the other within the self and also “[...] mi segunda madre. Una autómata de la palabra” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 218); in other words, this is the voice of conscience and, as such, having appeared in childhood, it will stand over time:

Fue entonces cuando aprendí que una voz distinta de mi propio pensamiento me hablaba a ratos y se dirigía solamente a mi dolor y a mi sueño. [...] La voz era indiscreta. Recuerdo que di con ella una mañana de domingo. Mientras la hija compasiva y obediente acompañaba a mi padre a su visita habitual al cementerio, la voz apareció de pronto para decirme en la cama:

- Mientras tú estás tranquila leyendo en tu habitación, fíjate en esos bobos camino del cementerio.

Yo era otra. Quería morirme. O me moría y era por eso que aparecía la voz (*Intimidad*, 1997: 76).

Its discourse is an echo that interprets reality while signalling the possibility of coherently phrasing it, a possibility of coherence from which the narrator always remains detached. Self-knowledge does not come from the voice although the voice is explanatory insofar as it is intrinsically mediatory, being halfway between the narrator’s text and the social. It explains to Nuria how the world outside works. But Nuria is not interested in her own social dimension, only in establishing an incoherent literary self. Still, “la voz” comes from literature. It could not have come from anywhere else. It is one of the voices that can be found in texts. Conscience then is just a voice and a discursive bridge between the self and reality, not between the self and literature. For the narrator, “la voz” exists thanks to the books because it is one of the possibilities present in them. On the other hand, books, novels in

particular, are there to prove that madness is recurrent in women (*Intimidad*, 1997: 78). There are instances in which the voice remains silent, particularly when it is substituted by another referent to interpret and bridge the gap between the individual narrator and the social world her gaze does not really observe. In this way, “la voz enmudece frente al televisor” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 132).

The formation novel or *bildungsroman* has been described as the narrative mould closest to the autobiographical genre which conforms to a masculinistic tradition whose expression focuses on recounting the great deeds of an individual, thereby casting aside the description of character *per se* and thus limiting the exploration of the self due to its very representational exclusion.¹ The psychic stays out, the deeds stay in or, as Butler’s reading of Foucault put forward in the first chapter of Part II, a psychoanalytical dimension could be read by looking for traces that have not been suppressed from main narratives.² If gender has become political, if there is such a thing as gender criticism being written, it is mainly owing to the critical analysis of the subject, done from many diverse angles: literary, sociological, psychoanalytical and even economical. The self found literary channels of expression outside the (auto)biographical genre, where symbolism was not expected and realism and prideful truthfulness were supposed to be present. There is a genre, the *bildungsroman*, which can be interpreted as an act of writing and reading autobiography in the other that is the self, i.e. an act of experiencing one’s own

¹ For further reference, see Ciplijauskaitė (1994 [1988]), Cronan Rose (1983), Duplessis (1985), Felman (1993), Stanley (1992).

² For further reference, see Butler (1997: 83-105).

otherness, something that the autobiography genre in itself cannot conceptually achieve or afford and also something a masculinistic genre traditionally always craving for oneness would not envisage as psychically necessary and maybe even unavoidable.

Attempting to express a coherent sense of self is possibly the most authenticating feature of any formation novel. The importance of not losing touch with the psychoanalytical category called self is paramount in considering the psychoanalytical novel and the *bildungsroman* as closely related genres. As a mode of representation, the *bildungsroman* illuminates the psychic effects of social power. The almost inevitable genderisation of character, a feature generally acknowledged by narratologists and gender critics alike, has been a key interpretative factor largely ignored due to the culturally accepted equation between gender and nature. In *La intimidación*, gender figures as the category never openly named but which greatly influences the exercise of literature and the absence or presence of discourse and silence about the body, about desire and about the self.

It cannot be said that, as *bildungsroman*, *La intimidación* illuminates the psychic effects of social power, but rather, the powerful psychic effects of metaliterature. From this perspective, the almost inevitable genderisation of character requires a modification of terms for the sake of interpreting the narrator's development. Maite, in *Pan de boda*, had decided to distance herself from the essentialisation culturally communicated by her body. The narrator of *La intimidación* is never essentialised as feminine. Her neurosis, her "locura" is caused by literature and is not preceded by

the genderisation of the self. The picture of society we get through the narrator's eyes cannot be considered to be very thorough. Although there are glimpses of ordinary life in Barcelona, these are subordinated to the displacement of the social by the literary as the fundamental field of referentiality for the process of construction of the subject with which the novel deals.³ In this way, the narrator's desire to explain her own subject position can only be fulfilled in a circular motion that operates within literature but that comprises at the same time a literarization of the city of Barcelona as spatial frame. The memory the narrator constructs of the town filters reality through elements related to the production of literature. These elements are thought and narrated from one window to the other and from one time of childhood to another, as will be discussed in the second section of this chapter, it being impossible to ascertain which one of the two is the only real one, i.e., who the narrator is. As Rodríguez Fischer alleges,

Ese deseo prolonga la capacidad visionaria y fabuladora propia de la infancia y permite presentar la voz exterior recubierta de una pátina afín. Porque parte de esa realidad es la estampa del poeta Foix en su pastelería del barrio de Sarriá, el sanatorio psiquiátrico que se alza en frente de la casa y en el que agonizan almas extraviadas, el monasterio de Pedralbes, el cementerio donde se halla la tumba de

³ Pedralbes, where she lives (*Intimidad*, 1997: 11) and Sarriá, where the poet J. V. Foix has his patisserie (*Intimidad*, 1997: 19), are the parts of Barcelona to which the narrator makes frequent reference. When describing the cemetery where her mother is buried, she talks about the writers, such as Clementina Arderiu, surrounding her grave (*Intimidad*, 1997: 32) and also mixes the description of Barcelona as literary scenario with the lives of the Goytisolo brothers in a very significant paragraph where she compares their family history to her own:

El cementerio estaba en una zona de torres familiares bastante más concurrida y armónica que la nuestra de Pedralbes, rodeada de campos y hojarasca otoñal, y también algo más habitada. Por aquel entonces, los hermanos Goytisolo estarían a punto de dejar, si no la habían dejado ya, la casa paterna sita precisamente, tal y como cuentan Juan y Luis en sus libros respectivos, en la calle Pablo Alcover, una torre desalmada de hombre viudo con no menos fantasmas que la nuestra. Una casa construida de orfandad y literatura. Una casa propia de una novela de Dickens (*Intimidad*, 1997: 22).

una madre. Y también porque por largo tiempo esa mujer que ahora nos habla vivirá encerrada con libros prohibidos o con sus escritos ilegibles. Y cuando alguien entra en su mundo, ese alguien se llama Pedro Páramo o Carles Riba, sus dos maridos (1998: 130).

It cannot be denied that the “capacidad visionaria y fabuladora propia de la infancia” is present throughout the text although it is not always possible to separate it from the “capacidad visionaria” the narrator has inherited from her books. Literature is always there. The library of the father was the presence she could not reject, and the library owned by her was meant to be the entity that initiated and sustained her agency: a substitute for the dead mother. This implied that she would become both writer and reader. Having a library implies having the necessary referential sphere to engage in a dialogic interaction with not only the absent mother, but also the living father, exponent of a generation cut in half by the Spanish Civil War, a generation that was dying “con la pereza de la palabra en la boca”, a generation of “resignados y sonámbulos” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 148), the generation which will be narrated in *El país del alma*. However, at the end, she will get nothing from the library of the father, from his canonical view of literature and his selection of Catalan texts.⁴ For the purposes of analysing the novel, it is important to bear in mind that this social silence results also in a silencing of genderisation processes, arguably the other most distinctive feature of *La intimidad*, together with its status as a text originating in an awareness of literary (dis)order.

⁴ Political representation is a key issue in contemporary women’s writing and one that branches off into different spheres of the political itself. In this way, both Amat and Butler deal with the notion of the citizen subject (relationship with the law in the Foucauldian sense and with legality), the feminist subject (a position within current critical thought), the national subject (there is an implicit criticism of radical nationalism in most of Amat’s works of fiction) and the gendered subject.

The lack of gender citationality is indeed a very intriguing feature of the text. The melancholy of gender and the melancholy of the social can be related and the referentiality of literature justified. Butler has analysed melancholia taking both Freud and Foucault as points of departure and relating melancholia to genderisation. Reading for gender and analysing the influence of genderisation processes in *La intimidad* is an interpretational move that can only be justified precisely by relating gender identity to the loss of an original love object, initial cause of melancholia. Butler's (1997) interpretation of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923) had two aims. Firstly, "to explain the sense in which a melancholic identification is central to the process whereby the ego assumes a gendered character". Secondly, "to explore how this analysis of the melancholic formation of gender sheds light on the predicament of living within a culture which can mourn the loss of homosexual attachment only with great difficulty" (Butler 1997: 133). The two points can be very illuminating when scrutinising the relationship between genderisation and metaliterature in Amat's book. The narrator never assumes a culturally recognisable gendered character, she avoids genderisation insofar as femininity is never inscribed in her body. She assumes a metaliterary self. On the other hand, the loss the father mourns has broader symbolic implications within the textual dynamics of the book, and within Amat's narrative poetics. For the narrator, the father possessed the mother in the same way that he possesses a library, but the library does not make him overcome his grief. It can therefore be affirmed that the grief of the father cannot be justified or understood solely by the death of the

mother. It is an unresolved question that the narrator leaves open for interpretation and questioning and that can be addressed by resorting to *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, Amat's unpublished novel.⁵

As Freud alleges in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) when a loved object is lost through death or absence, it is taken into the subject. The mother is the lost loved object in the case of *La intimidad*. Her absence is also related to the distinctively gendered "bienestar de dulce y caramelo" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 25) which the father is unable to teach to his female daughter. Freud establishes a comparison between the effects of mourning and melancholia. Both mourner and melancholic have lost interest in the external world, both the father's and the daughter's interest in the external world is, as mentioned before, subordinated to literature. Literary interest filters ordinary life. Having literature as a substitute love-object implies that their life participation is much reduced, an effect Freud pointed out regarding the mourner and the melancholic. Where the cause of mourning is the loss of a real object –the father really had the mother–, "the catalyst [for melancholia] is a narcissistically experienced rejection from the loved object, whereby an already existing ambivalence attendant upon relation to objects is intensified" (Wright 1996 [1992]: 61). Identification with the mother exists within the text:

⁵ See next chapter. The narrator describes her father's perpetual grief as "[...] un dolor que mi padre llevaba arrastrando desde su primera hasta su segunda boda" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 173) and "una doble nostalgia" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 148). It is clear that the grieving father and the absent mother have influenced the archaeology of the narrator's agency in a way that exceeds binarism but it is relevant to observe how she relates the grief of the father to the first wedding and not to the death of the first wife.

La muerta a la que íbamos a visitar y a rendir culto era una mujer, como yo. Y yo misma, no cesaban de repetirlo, me parecía tanto a la muerta que no podía por menos que sentirme responsable de su desaparición (*Intimidad*, 1997: 25).

These are the messages Nuria is receiving from the world outside. However, these messages originate from the social dimension the book deals with only marginally. The justification for the mother's disappearance is going to be searched for in the ultimate holder of meaning: the library. Rejection is for Nuria the same as never having and it is this having been narcissistically rejected by the mother that causes her identity to be metaliterary: she is both reader and writer, plagiarist and interpreter of everything that is literary; in other words, a metaliterary and intertextual subject. Towards the end of the book, after these two identifications have been sufficiently established to produce self-characterisation, the narrator speaks to the image of the mother: "La escritura es un castigo casi tan grande como tu compañía. Como voy a desprenderme de ti si formo parte de tu vida" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 242).

Having already stated that the narrator's gender identity does not lend itself to definition because she lacks the mother it can be ascertained that, because she has always been separated from her, this separation cannot initiate her agency. From a psychoanalytical point of view, her never having that supposedly crucial attachment to what Kristeva has termed *chora* could be interpreted as the cause of her melancholia. The narrator puts forward the idea that her feminine dimension can be sustained only with difficulty and therefore is not maintained at all. As a consequence, eroticism is, as far as she is concerned, just a silence in the same way that femininity is.

It can be concluded that gender influence in *La intimidad* has a two-fold dimension: gender not only touches upon characterisation –and maybe this is a very slight touch, maybe gender actually just misses the psychological development of character in the book– but it also influences the activity of writing as woman and the interpretation of women’s writing. The unfolding of the narrator’s voice lacks a cohesive construction of gender identity. In other words, gender has somehow been silenced. Therefore, a certain androgyny of this female voice could easily be explained through her lack of feminine genderisation in childhood. The death of the mother turns the narrator into a deficient learner of femininity, a fact reinforced by the allusion to the archetypal image of the witch:

Pero siempre había algo debajo o alrededor de estas prendas que denotaba mi incomodidad al llevarlas. Mis vestidos de niña bien, por tules y gasas rosadas o azulonas que tuvieran, jamás eran los vestidos que yo veía llevar a las niñas bien. Mis movimientos eran bruscos y rabiosos. La mantilla se me caía irremediabilmente, y si lograba enderezarla y mantenerla quieta sobre mi cabeza, siempre sobresalían a través de ella dos ojos irónicos de bruja encorsetada (*Intimidad*, 1997: 15-16).

Reflexivity is related to otherness. And otherness has a double perspective in the book. This double perspective is related to the absence of gender. In this way, it can be claimed that *La intimidad* delineates two ways of experiencing otherness. Both of them are rooted in literature. There is, of course, otherness within the self and experiencing the self as necessary other cannot indeed be detached from literature. Literature is the main source of identification the narrator uses and it is also going to be the path to the masculine other although literature, novels in particular, contains

assumptions on gender and on the perception of woman and of man. Reading for them makes no sense for the narrator's metaliterary way of seeing herself. As a consequence, masculinity is as other as femininity in the text. This second dimension of otherness is therefore related to the absence of cohesiveness of gender configuration in the process of subject formation with which the novel deals.

The narrator's father is the character that teaches her about silence. The narrator only characterises her father as a sad widower and a sad paternal figure, but he is also, in a way, her "padre literario" and, as Amat considers in *Letra herida* (1998), "romper el lenguaje, desestabilizarlo de sus márgenes ha dejado de tener sentido, o todo el sentido que nuestros padres literarios daban a la destrucción/floración de un nuevo texto" (*Letra*, 1998: 18). His permanent mourning is always linked by the narrator to his having failed to fulfil the role of husband rather than having lost it because of his wife's death. Additionally, his more feminine traits make the house look as if there was a woman living in it. It can be stated that through these features, the narrator puts forward the idea that being a man is not unproblematic. The father does not emerge in the text for long enough to label himself homosexual, a feature Woods considers typical of writers such as Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Townsend Warner (1999: 202) who play with the meaning of gender in order to communicate an ambiguous sexual identity. The presence of the father and the absence of the mother condition the narrator's relationship with the outside world. Throughout the whole text, the absence of the mother cannot be separated from the absence of genderisation in the self-development of the narrator.

Her generic sex is not an issue and neither is her biological sex. Estrangement fills the silence of gender and this estrangement is loaded with melancholic and metaliterary meaning. Femininity is virtually an unspoken and unrepresented condition of signification only because it is a quality the mother was supposed to have and to pass on. However, the narrator isolates feminine traits in the father, conveying at the same time the meaning that the father does not succeed in teaching her to be a girl although he tries. It is precisely this trying and not succeeding that could have inaugurated the narrator's lack of interest in the material dimension of gender and the relationship between gender and body: a silence. In the narrator's words,

Mi cuerpo, creo, fue siempre una especie de huella o cicatriz dejada por la ausencia de sexo. Las sombras no tienen sexo. Y yo fui siempre la sombra de todas las mujeres que me escondieron en mi infancia. Me escondía delante o detrás de mi necesidad de sexo (*Intimidad*, 1997: 267).

This "necesidad de sexo" should be interpreted as the want or desire of being coherently sexed. This is a need, this is wanted because this is an empty space, a silence and paradoxically also a dilemma that neither literature nor the social and not even her text can solve. Foucault relates the discourse on sex to the discourse of identity by affirming that

C'est par le sexe en effet, point imaginaire fixé par le dispositif de sexualité, que chacun doit passer pour avoir accès à sa propre intelligibilité (puisque'il est à la fois l'élément caché et le principe producteur de sens), à la totalité de son corps (puisque'il en est une partie réelle et menacée et qu'il en constitue symboliquement le tout), à son identité (puisque'il joint à la force d'une pulsion la singularité d'une histoire) (1976: 205-206).

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, feminists have used Foucault to establish the influence of gender identity as a predicament conditioning the relationship between discourse on sex and on the body and, from that intersection, instructing the emergence of a discourse on identity or self-representation. The discourse of sex coherence or being coherently sexed is never apprehended by the narrator because she does not equate it to being coherently gendered. Could it be claimed that none of the characters she narrates are? The father's masculinity is problematic. The mother's feminine qualities that remain in the discourse of others and that the narrator reproduces make Nuria create an image of a neurologically unstable woman whose sex has also been silenced.⁶ It is not part of her history or of her intelligibility or of her body. And neither is part of the narrator's.

Butler (1990) relates melancholy to masquerade in order to incorporate gender issues to the psychoanalytical exploration of the female melancholic subject. However, by locating the process of gender incorporation within melancholia, Amat does not focus on the borders between heterosexuality and homosexuality because the narrator's female body and her sexuality is never as relevant as what goes on in the mind. Elsewhere the narrator equates sex with silence, concluding that "el silencio del sexo se repetía para señalar los posibles datos de la vida y obras de mi madre" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 266). From a Foucauldian perspective, the strategies that underlie the narrator's discourse would be related to the silencing of sex and

⁶ The father's characterisation can be traced backwards into *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* and the mother's can be traced forward into *El país del alma*. See next chapter.

eroticism in her family. But there is also the silencing of proper feminine genderisation. For the narrator, sex is a silence, and a silence that the mother and other hidden women could have filled with signification but never did because of being silent within what the narrator could actually perceive. The silence of others is loaded with meaning. In Foucault's words,

Le mutisme lui-même, les choses qu'on se refuse à dire ou qu'on interdit de nommer, la discrétion qu'on requiert entre certains locuteurs, sont moins la limite absolue du discours, l'autre côté dont il serait séparé par une frontière rigoureuse, que des éléments qui fonctionnent à côté des choses dites, avec elles et par rapport à elles dans des stratégies d'ensemble. Il n'y a pas à faire de partage binaire entre ce qu'on dit pas; il faudrait essayer de déterminer les différentes manières de ne pas les dire, comment se distribuent ceux qui peuvent et ceux qui ne peuvent pas en parler, quel type de discours est autorisé ou quelle forme de discrétion est requise pour les uns et les autres. Il n'y a pas un, mais des silences et ils font partie intégrante des stratégies qui soustendent et traversent les discours (1976: 38-39).

The circumstances surrounding the death of the mother can be considered to be the most meaningful silence of the book because it is a silence ruled by the father. Although the narrator ends up finding out pieces of the story of her mother's life and death through other family members, these never satisfy her desire to know, hence her metaliterary search for answers in the library of the father, his other love-object. Since the father never communicates anything about the deceased, her search needs to be carried out. Instead of telling the children about the mother, he talks about literature especially when he takes them to visit the tomb. Apart from learning discretion from this, the narrator will subsequently link the absence of the love-object the mother necessarily was to the love his father feels for the library and for literature. There are two common referential points between father and daughter: the

mother and the library. When a child, Nuria realises that the implicit refusal to name or talk about the mother whose voice, for the narrator, surely exists under the grave or hidden in the rooms of the attic, is always substituted by a discourse about the contents of literature, i.e. what exists behind all front covers inside what will have to become the other common referent: the library. As the narrator says, the father has alleviated the grief for the death of the mother “rodeándose de libros y de palabras dichas a propósito de cómo deben escribirse los libros” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 25), a fact the narrator relates to his urging her to write like Dickens even though it seems they read Dickens differently:

Mi padre ignoraba que las novelas realistas de Dickens eran calificadas de ese modo por su exceso de datos personales y autobiográficos (*Intimidad*, 1997: 178).

As a matter of fact, they both have different and even opposing views of the autobiographical subject and of what biography and autobiography are, different views regarding the role of memory in the configuration of literary texts and, finally, their conceptualisation of the relationship between fiction and reality ultimately answers to divergent poetics too. He seems to be afraid of her potential ability to disrupt signifying conventions whereas, for her, signifying conventions are disrupted anyway. Growing up implies, for the narrator, being able to write more, read more and have a bigger library of her own, different from the one owned by the father. The father has taught her that silence, his silence, is important because it is meaningful. The meaning it seems to have the power to promise, but never bestows, is the one

she thinks she should try to possess and the one she is going to try to find in literature.

Through an analysis of Freud and Foucault, Judith Butler links the performative power of gender to melancholia, a move permanently present in Amat. Both the father and the daughter can be considered as melancholic and it can also be stated that gender has failed to regulate them both. In the case of the narrator, the development of her subjection is close to ungenderisation because the citational power of gender is virtually non-existent due to the absence of the mother. The narrator's relationship with the main masculine characters (her father and her two husbands) never serves the purpose of imposing binarisms on the construction of gender identity. Men also hide and/or die repeatedly in the sphere of literature: the father dies, Pedro Páramo is the voice of a dead person, and Carles Riba commits suicide.

The Catalan poet Carles Riba makes possible the drawing, within the text, of "las líneas infernales. Los límites de la sinrazón y la cordura: otra vez la frontera. La frontera del dolor y del idioma" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 250). He voices or comments on her fears, e.g. suicide; he is also her only reader. Both the narrator and the Catalan poet have always inhabited "en el lado mudo de la vida" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 207). The difference between them is that he suffers from an anxiety to define, to make theory and be dogmatic. He defines what communication is and his approach subtly places power at the core of the process turning the receiver –listener, reader and therefore also the narrator– into a slave of cultural codes and symbols that exist to be

perpetuated and that he feels he compulsively repeats, whereas she does not, because she is “una rebelde de los símbolos” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 144) insofar as she herself builds the image of her female body with hardly any reference to gender-based culturally recognisable commonplaces.

Carles Riba, her second husband, whose grandfather’s tomb –the other Carles Riba– is next to the narrator’s mother, is the agent who originates the textual contrast between the two different stays of the narrator in the clinic: the one in the past, after her father died and the one near the present, where Carles has given her the space of the clinic. They share it after having exchanged their libraries for it. Carles Riba is different from the father and from Pedro Páramo and he can be considered as the most important masculine other after the father. As opposed to the narrator, who is multiple, the suicidal Carles Riba, “el doctor muerte”, is double and he gives the impression of being real, unlike Pedro Páramo, always rendered by the narrator with a dye of imaginative construction, not quite real and not quite fictitious. He is in love with the woman reader, whose eroticism he considers absent: “–A ver si eres capaz de encontrar en alguno de estos libros párrafos escritos sobre el erotismo que produce una figura femenina leyendo –me retó” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 201). The narrator related the absence of eroticism in her family to the absence of the mother. On the other hand, it is important to note that gender only becomes effective when enacted in a compulsive way and this is why femininity is not an issue in *La intimidad*. What can be found in the novel are “[...] abjected specters that threaten the arbitrarily closed domain of subject positions. Perhaps only by risking the *incoherence* of identity is

connection possible, [...].” (Butler 1997: 197). This is related to the other possibilities of female subjectivity presented in the novel and materialized in the characters of the other women writers the narrator meets at the psychiatric hospital of El Maresme and also to the narrator’s separate rendering of her own conscience: “la voz”. The dead or silenced voices she reads in literature and the other possibilities of female writing Nuria observes in the clinic are all “abjected specters” and Nuria knows her subject position will never be arbitrarily closed but constantly opened. She never risks incoherence because it is precisely coherence that she never has and craves for. What she writes –“textos ilegibles” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 187)– and what she is –“una loca camuflada” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 191)–, are problematic forms of representation fabulated by her melancholic search for subjection in literature.

2. EL PAÍS DEL ALMA: A RETURN TO THE BODY IN

A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE, LOVE

AND THE DISCOURSE OF THE LAW

Gradually, the tubercular look, which symbolized an appealing vulnerability, a superior sensitivity, became more and more the ideal look for women –while great men of the mid and late nineteenth century grew fat, founded industrial empires, wrote hundreds of novels, made wars and plundered continents (Sontag 1991 [1977]: 30).

The myth of TB constitutes the next-to-last episode in the long career of the ancient idea of melancholy –which was the artist’s disease, according to the theory of the four humors. The melancholy character –or the tubercular– was a superior one: sensitive, creative, a being apart (Sontag 1991 [1977]: 32-33).

In the same way that *The Magic Mountain* (Mann 1924) can be read as a “late, self-conscious commentary on the myth of TB” (Sontag 1991 [1977]: 35), *El país del alma* can be read as a self-conscious analysis of the construct of femininity and its relationship with a metaphorical use of illness. As was stated in the first chapter of Part I, self-consciousness belongs to psychoanalytical studies of the self. The word that can best describe the description and construction of Nena Rocamora (female protagonist and female narrator of the novel) is the adjective “tubercular” understood in a mythical sense, as Sontag describes it in the second quotation given above. But there is more to the characterisation of Nena than the rendering of her psyche. The self-consciousness Sontag identifies implies that the construct itself is

not silenced but presented in the work. In accordance with the line of thought laid out in Part I which located metaliterature and metaliterary discourse between intertextuality and self-reflexivity, the construction of Nena Rocamora's subjectivity appears as the most sophisticated of Amat's metaliterary inventions. The adjective "self-reflexive" includes the textuality that sustains her characterisation. This section will discuss how the act of reading femininity in Nena Rocamora's development turns out to be a tragic act of interpretation. *El país del alma* is the story of the death of Nena Rocamora and is also a portrait of the learned bourgeoisie living in Barcelona in the post-war era. Nena's death is the most literary of deaths. Her death can be read as a literary construct. Its literariness will be deconstructed in the present section.⁷ The woman, the reader, writer and thinker, the wife, the mother and ultimately the member of society are all there to be deciphered. None of these subject positions is simple. Nena's perfect femininity appears to be a signifier with a complex signified. Its meaning can only be grasped by resorting to literature and understanding Nena's textual pursuits as reader and writer of verses in a black notebook. As Rosa Montero remarked on her discourse given at the official presentation of *El país del alma* (May/1999):

[...] Nena es una mujer que tiene una fisura, un abismo con la realidad. [...] Esa fisura, ese vacío, ese ojo negro, son los demonios del escritor [...]. Nena es una artista, está en ese agujero de la creación, [...] pero es una artista para ella, porque no se lo reconocen. Ella es una extranjera. Pertenece al país del alma. El país del alma no se sabe dónde está pero no está en este mundo. [...] Su propia fisura, más el aplastamiento de una posguerra [...], ese ambiente de renuncia y de pérdida de todo y de falta de dignidad y de falta de medida de uno mismo. En esa posguerra nadie

⁷ The second section of the forthcoming chapter will deal with the symbolic implications the existence of this character has for Amat's narrative poetics.

sabe quién es, y ella que ya tiene problemas para saber quien es, pues resulta aplastada. [...] resulta muy simbólico y además hermoso que primero se desmaya, pasa la vida desmayándose, no quiere vivir en este mundo y se ausenta. Después empiezan a decir que tiene algo en los pulmones porque no puede respirar: el mundo es irrespirable. Después dicen que tiene algo en el corazón, porque con ese corazón no se puede vivir. Es un corazón que falla.

Having dealt extensively with the concept of femininity from several different perspectives –psychoanalytical, sociological, philosophical–, the main analytical concern of contemporary gender criticism is to elucidate whether there is something about what one might call ‘femaleness’ waiting to be expressed. This issue has made philosophers and gender critics such as Jehlen, Miller, Felman and less so Butler turn their minds towards fiction and look at the ways female characters narrate themselves or are omnisciently narrated; in other words, the way they construct their subjectivity or the way a process of subjectivisation is constructed for them. One might get the impression that Amat’s novels and also *Todos somos Kafka* compulsively give relevance to the figure of the female writer and/or reader, turning her relationship with the predominantly male literary canon into a crucial narrative strand in most of her works of fiction. This rationale has been treated from many different perspectives throughout the twenty years that separate her first published novel *Pan de boda* (1979) from *El país del alma* (1999).

What does *El país del alma* offer the reader? Nena Rocamora, female protagonist of the novel, can be described as a frustrated writer without a real space to write who transcribes, only occasionally, the poems her mind dictates to a small black notebook. She is not in appearance an unhappy character, although we are told

that Nena's happiness is "una felicidad con urticaria" (*País*, 1999: 80). There is always an objection; she is always going further. There lies the endless chain the desire for representation is supposed to be.

In *El país del alma* the theme of female literary-subjectivity is situated in a very concrete sociological context: the Cataluña of the post-war era, the early years of Franco's dictatorship. The detailed contextualisation is very relevant insofar as it constitutes the frame of the subject, or what frames subjectivity. It is also the hindrance that submerges Nena's desire for representation into a subtextual layer of representation, a layer that remains down under, down below the surface of the text that renders her textual image. This asks for decodification for the sake of understanding. Within the background and frame of this elaborate description of a town, of a time and of a society, textual silence, what is not said or written, the 'under' or 'below' text, transpires and permeates the narrative discourse of three voices: the voice of the omniscient narrator, and the voices of Nena Rocamora and Baltus Arnau, female and male protagonists respectively and also narrators. *El país del alma* is the story of the life of Nena Rocamora, but also of Baltus Arnau. The story of the love between them finishes when Nena dies. And it is Nena's death that makes the book appear retrospectively as her story more than his or more than theirs. Textual silence constructs a surrogate text, crucial to comprehend the development of Baltus, and more especially, Nena. Her melancholic interaction with the world in which she lives can only be fully understood by appealing to what Nena reads and to how she reads as a woman. Her textual image is loaded with silences, with words

never said, written in her “libreta negra” or kept in the silence of the mind. Nena’s words come from the country of the soul, an inner space she has nourished with her readings and her love for Baltus Arnau:

Cuando yo hablo
los otros miran mi silencio
y me juzgan con sus ojos
como si fuera una extranjera
Cuando yo hablo
los libros saltan por mi voz
explotan cadáveres en mi garganta
Cuando yo hablo
las palabras se anudan entre ellas
abrazadas las sílabas en boca de niños abandonados
Todo eso deja de ocurrir
Cuando no hablo (*País*, 1999: 264-265).

Nena Rocamora longs for and fears the space in which she is free. The space in which she can represent herself infinitely is the one in which she is not a mother or a wife and maybe not even a woman. Whether she can actually name this space and therefore shape her longing is a debatable issue. However, there is enough textual evidence to suggest that this, an unsatisfied and unsatisfiable desire to be and become, is one of her silences. In the days of their courtship, when Baltus and Nena write love letters to each other, the omniscient voice speaks about Nena’s fear and relates it to what she wants to accomplish in life:

Pero Nena tiene miedo al miedo. Que no se repita el pasado, le contesta. El pasado es apretado y corto. No quiero un futuro rápido. Busco un futuro misterioso (*País*, 1999: 49).

When put in contrast with the description of these post-war years, her fear is unavoidably linked to the impossible nature of her desires to be something that ultimately remains a mystery because it is not a possibility that exists for her and, sadly, her future is going to be “rápido” without the promise of unexpected acts of becoming.⁸ The subject not only *is*, the subject also *becomes*. It is in the becoming that the social in general, and genderisation in particular, play a fundamental role in order to achieve individual and social intelligibility. Nena’s verses tell us that, when she talks, others look at her silence and judge her, i.e., decide who she is and give her an identity: why is this the identity of a foreigner? At the same time, when Nena talks, books allegedly jump through her voice, books that are already corpses, already dead. For both Baltus and Nena, being a reader is like being a foreigner in an unknown country. The perception of one’s own otherness achieved through literature, through the written word, is therefore determinant. Nena reads and is a poet like Maite, the narrator of *Pan de boda*. As far as her own representation is concerned, the omniscient narrator of *El país del alma* states that Nena, being the granddaughter of a compiler of an encyclopaedia, is afraid of having her image linked to his:

Nena no quería tener la enciclopedia persiguiendo las huellas de sus pasos. Que allá donde pisara, todos dijeran, ahí viene la nieta de la Gran Enciclopedia Ilustrada

⁸ Her attitude to travelling also illustrates her longing for another life:

Cuando regresaron a la ciudad dijeron que el viaje les había resultado corto. El verdadero viaje es otro, pensó Nena. Un viaje en tren o por barco. Un viaje que pueda durar media vida o, al menos, que diera esa impresión (*País*, 1999: 119).

Constante Rivalaigua. Por eso, escribía versos a escondidas. Rompía las palabras de las novelas. Deshacía el miedo (*País*, 1999: 31).

This quotation explains Nena's attitude towards the written word and the influence that this theme has on the actual form of the novel. Influenced by literature, she relates the activity of writing to the activity of naming and of being called. An author is a name or a name is an author because of the words written by him or her. She is the granddaughter of a compiler but she does not want to be recognised through his words.⁹ However, this is just a fear existing in her mind and nothing will, in reality, be done about it. Nena is not going to say to Baltus or any of the others: "I am afraid of being related to my grandfather's name and to what he did with words". There is only one real piece of information in this sentence: Constante Rivalaigua existed and edited that *Gran Enciclopedia Ilustrada*. The rest happens only in Nena's mind, the country of her soul, peopled by her, her love for Baltus and literature, that is to say, her readings and the verses she writes in the black notebook. The solution to this mental dilemma is a hidden one: writing verses is an activity done "a escondidas";

⁹ This is a metaliterary fear and an excellent example of the way Amat inserts biographical material from her own life –her mother was the granddaughter of the encyclopaedist Espasa– and from other writers into the characterisation of her narrative voices. Similarly, Virginia Woolf's father compiled the *Dictionary of National Biography*, his major life's work. As Hermione Lee (1997) suggests in her biography of Woolf, she did not wish to be associated to his way of writing either. Additionally, in *La intimidad*, Nuria, the narrator, having been given one of her mother's books and seeing the mother's handwriting on the first page makes the following remark:

[...] la letra de mi madre. Una letra con el nombre de mi madre y sus dos apellidos familiares, por si acaso se perdía y tenían que buscarlo por su segundo apellido, el de la enciclopedia de renombre. Su apellido de enciclopedia célebre y universalizada (*Intimidad*, 1997: 49).

Amat is therefore the greatgranddaughter of Espasa. Given that Amat's second surname and therefore first surname of her mother is Noguera, it can be deduced that Espasa was the second surname of her own mother.

those verses are not meant to be read and therefore, sadly, do not exist, as Roland Barthes would have argued. In order to write them, Nena breaks the words of novels –“Rompía las palabras de las novelas” (*País*, 1999: 31)– and, in this way, she manages to undo a fear that is related to her unfulfilled desire of representation and of being. At the same time, by undoing narrative she is redoing poetry: manipulating literary genres and recreating the relationship between their form and their content. This act of breaking the novel and reconstructing the narrative genre into poetry or, rather, poetic discourse, in order to momentarily satisfy her desire to *become* and undo her fear of not *being* supports Nena’s characterisation, constructed in as much detail as the one of the world she lives in. Additionally, the description of her image gains outstanding textual relevance as a counterbalance to the narrative of her melancholic mind.

At this point, it must be stated that Nena’s social emergence as a woman is a very complete one. She is presented as unique. She is beautiful, mysterious, loving, elegant, desiring and desirable, poetic and silent; a description that makes the reader evoke the figure of a romantic muse. And this evocation remains stable throughout the novel and does not change until Nena feels unable to think further. There comes a moment when her desire for literature and for representation stops. From then on, the story of her death, rather than of her life, will fully take over the narration. Poetry abandons her, reading becomes more difficult: she cannot live and therefore she has to die. Her death can only be fully understood and interpreted if taken as a literary construct. Furthermore, as a literary construct, it has implications in particular for

this novel and in general for the analysis of Amat's narrative poetics, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Death is always present in the text in some way or other. The Civil War is part of the memory of the characters and this is a memory loaded with death and destruction, real exile and exile in the homeland. Baltus and Nena have three daughters and when the second one, Aloma, is still a baby, she suffers from what appears to be meningitis and is on the verge of death. Nena, terrified of seeing her child die, says:

He hecho una promesa [...]. Si la niña se pone bien no volveré a pintarme las uñas de rojo (*País*, 1999: 204).

The omniscient narrator interprets or represents this promise further, inserting it in a wider context, making –not only a poetic– but also a feminist interpretation of the act. It is only in this way that Nena's sacrifice can be understood:

Las uñas pintadas de rojo vivo eran como corazones abiertos que las mujeres levantaban hacia el cielo. Latidos de felicidad cansada. Delantales de alegría en las manos. Las mujeres eran perfeccionistas en esa técnica de embellecer sus manos. Cuando la vida estaba vacía las mujeres pintaban cuadros en sus manos. Las más refinadas dejaban una media luna hueca de esmalte en el extremo de la uña (*País*, 1999: 204).

This act of reinterpretation of a feminine aesthetic act of personal embellishment is given a symbolic importance that possibly only exists for Nena. We know that Nena's happiness can be "una felicidad cansada". The tedium, the resignation of the epoch, are becoming part of her. As was mentioned at the beginning of this section,

hers was also “una felicidad con urticaria” (*País*, 1999: 80). Material happiness does not imply a happiness of the mind. It actually enhances her desire for representation that contrasts with the increasing stability of her reality; a stability that is only apparent because Aloma’s illness makes Nena understand that reality is not stable. The tragic event that does not happen would have made life static forever. Quite logically, she sees the possible death of Aloma as her own death and the lives of both inextricably bound. Nena keeps the sick girl with her and, when they are both asleep, Baltus separates them and takes the baby to her cot. This is a very meaningful act because the omniscient narrative voice that alternates with those of Baltus and Nena, and has access to their minds, tells us why Baltus does this. In order to explain why, the third-person voice requires literary allusions. While Nena is with the baby in her arms, Baltus nervously sits apart from them both:

Baltus dibujaba acertijos inservibles que morían en la papelera. Su pensamiento quedaba perdido en la punta de la pluma. Cuando el silencio era ya un papel blanco de escritura transparente, entraba en el dormitorio y separaba a la madre de la niña. Por miedo. No quería saber de qué tenía miedo pero sentía que éste era su deber de padre (*País*, 1999: 204-205).

When he stops scribbling –he too would have liked to be a writer, frustration is also part of his life– and his role of father takes over, he feels obliged to separate the sleeping mother from the sleeping child. Aloma’s illness makes Baltus be afraid of that mysterious woman Nena ultimately is. Nena never loses her aura, that special quality that, for Baltus, seems to separate her from the rest of women. The influence his own literary readings may have on his conception of Nena cannot be

underestimated. However, there are two facets to be considered on this particular aspect. If, through literature, he can let himself be influenced by romanticism, he can also, as a reader, unavoidably decode her as strange due to her “delirios internos” (País, 1999: 15). Furthermore, as he says to himself before they get married, at the time of their courtship: “Ella no sabe. Está ausente. Todo el mundo lo dice. No es un secreto” (País, 1999: 17). Both Nena and Baltus are readers although their attitudes to the written word differ. Baltus’s lifelong ambition of possessing a library contrasts with Nena’s endless search for representation in novels. As a reader, she looks for herself in books and tries to read her own reflection in other female characters. Has Baltus also done that? Certainly. He gives *Madame Bovary* to Nena, he gives her short stories by Chekov, also *Ana Karenina* and *La Regenta*:¹⁰ nineteenth-century novels that deal with what Martín Gaité has defined as “tedio femenino” (1987: 30). In her own words:

Más de la mitad de las novelas escritas por hombres en el siglo XIX tienen por protagonista a una mujer que [...] sueña, apoyándose en modelos literarios, con vivir aventuras pasionales, nunca en tomar de verdad las riendas de su existencia como ser pensante. Flaubert, Chejov, Tolstói, Eça de Queiroz, Clarín, Pérez Galdós, Valera y otros tantos geniales buceadores del tedio femenino no proponen al problema más opción que la del adulterio (Martín Gaité 1987: 32-33).

¹⁰ Their third daughter is called Ana, like Ana Karenina, and physically takes after her mother. Her birth merges with Nena’s death. Like her other two sisters, called Esther –like Esther Greenwood, protagonist of Plath’s *The Bell Jar* (1963)– and Aloma –the same name as the title of a novel by Rodoreda–, the third girl receives a literary name on purpose. The literary purpose is only known to Nena and Baltus and it seems to be Nena the only one who believes the names will function as lucky charms:

Dijeron que querían ponerle un nombre corto y que sonara bien. Decidieron que esta niña tenía cara de llamarse Ana. Dijeron que Ana era un nombre literario pero guardaron este pensamiento para ellos. Nena estaba convencida de que los nombres de heroínas literarias traerían suerte a sus hijas (País, 1999: 292).

Like Nena, the female protagonists of these novels in a way or other, “no saben” and are “ausentes”. Since disease is speaking through the emaciation of her body, Nena is taken to a place where the signification of her body is cancelled. Nena is taken to the “sanatorio para tuberculosos” (País, 1999: 332) and we learn that doctors do not know what exactly is wrong with her. The place is described as “un edificio que atraía y repelía al mismo tiempo” (País, 1999: 344) and the omniscient narrator also explains the function of this place in the community. According to Sontag, the TB vaccine began to be used in 1948, the year Nena dies is 1952:¹¹

Ahora era otra clase de enfermos los que iban a estos edificios recónditos y solitarios para recuperarse de sus males insensatos. Según contó Baltus cuando regresó de su primera visita al sanatorio, había enfermos de corazón, de pulmón, de alma y de cerebro. Había enfermos a causa del estrépito de las bombas. Heridos en el alma por la guerra. Padecían disgustos de la vida e iban allí como un último intento de conseguir desmadejar de su interior la fatiga de sus nervios.

La única presencia que aún quedaba viva en el sanatorio era la de la muerte. Pero esta impresión se la guardó Baltus para él solo (País, 1999: 338).

The fatigue of Nena’s nerves is the tedium Martín Gaité describes. *El país del alma*, and more particularly Nena’s story, emerges in this way as a reading of the nineteenth-century theme of the oppressed female subject, a theme also present in the repressive first years of the post-war era. By reading the excerpt just quoted in relation to the end of the book and to the confusion of voices the book exhibits, it is possible to put forward an identity for the omniscient voice. The omniscient voice

¹¹ In 1952 isoniazid was introduced to treat TB. By then, the treatment was fully developed, the mortality rate was decreasing and finally “the power of the myth was dispelled” (Sontag 1991 [1977]: 35). It is important to point out that Nena does not have TB, the doctors do not even consider it because she does not have the key symptom of coughing blood.

that tells the story and leads the voices of Nena and Baltus into the discourse can be read as the voice of Nena, but of the dead Nena, subtextually present, making sense and expressing what her voice never dared or could write or say when she was alive. Reading her death imposes a reinterpretation of her life. Only then the way her eyes saw her world can be revealed and we can read her as she read herself in the part of her life that remained in the silence of the mind. In this way we know why she thinks she has ended up there, in the “sanatorio”, it is because of her fear and she knows where to locate it:

Mi miedo es distinto. Es un miedo al dolor. Miedo a la ignorancia de mi cuerpo. No sé quien soy. No sé que tengo. Me apartan. Me separan (*País*, 1999: 332).

Her separation from the others is phrased as a penalty she has had to pay for her difference. She will eventually realise that there is no turning back from that moment when she understands her fear and her separation. Knowing that the end of her life is near and knowing that Baltus is aware of it, she gains an understanding not only of herself but also of him:

Comprende que necesito llorar, que ha llegado para mí la hora de llorar. En sus ojos leo que siente compasión de mí. Yo también la siento de él: compasión y enfado de que haya sido un hombre tímido, de que no haya sabido construir ni mi vida ni la suya.

[...] Contigo es más difícil ser otra. No existe una pared entre nosotros. Tú y yo hemos construido nuestra vida como si fuera única.

Te pareces a uno de esos hombres de Chejov, tímidos y faltos de ánimo. Dispuestos a perderse en el olvido. Se convencen demasiado pronto de que no tienen suerte y de que la propia vida les ha engañado.

La guerra quiso robarnos las ganas de vivir y, después, cuando pudimos querer la vida, el agujero era demasiado hondo y nosotros ya estábamos cansados.

Como esta señora N. de Chejov, yo también he sido amada. La felicidad estaba tan cerca de mí que parecía vivir a mi lado. Inventaba mi felicidad en la alegría de Lola (*País*, 1999: 371).

This is the nearest Nena gets to an anagnorisis. Very near her death, she dares to phrase something she had known long time ago: the image of her self she could see in Baltus, her image as love object, could not be enough. The process of Nena's death can be read as a progressive closure of signification, very similar in content to Maite's in *Pan de boda*, although Maite's anagnorisis comes before she becomes a mother and after she has decided not to be a wife. She had challenged the classically essentialising identity roles and she could afford to do so because she lives a generation after Nena. The frustrated writer does not get out of the pattern socially prescribed for her. The image of the lively Lola strongly contrasts with that of Nena's. With Lola, Nena shares laughter, holidays, special occasions like New Year's Eve of 1950, when Nena's beauty is at its peak and she becomes more isolated than ever, her mysterious beauty, again tubercular, setting her apart from everyone else, even apart from Baltus. Lola happily lives her marriage to Nena's brother, gives birth to a child every summer and does not question her status as a woman. Nena does. And that is what makes her feel ignorant of her body, a type of ignorance similar to the one that characterises Lorca's Yerma. In Nena's case, she does not know how to avoid pregnancy. She loves her daughters dearly but she would like to have control over their conception. The gap between her understanding of her marital life and Baltus's understanding of it can only be fully appreciated by exploring the implications of the sadness and disappointment of the words Nena uses

to describe her body. She goes to Ampurias on a family trip with her sisters and brothers-in-law. Her difference gets consolidated through the critical words of her older sisters but, most importantly, by what she says to Baltus when they are sitting together on the beach:

Tengo un cuerpo inútil, dijo sin dejar de mirar el suelo de arena blanca.
Tenemos tres hijas, dijo Baltus (*País*, 1999: 325).

His message is “your body is not useless”. At that time, Baltus’s failure to see what is happening to Nena’s mind, and by extension to her body, becomes increasingly clear. His observation of her body is romantic and, at the end, in accordance to romanticism, he does not believe Nena’s illness can be cured because her illness is in her character and her character is the illness and, being like a man from Chekov’s novels, there is nothing he can do. The progressive absence of passion in her life happens as her identity forecloses itself further and she sees her future confined to motherhood and her very own literary activities as silent. Pregnancy is equated with words that were not desired, because she is ignorant of how to control or avoid it: “Nena Rocamora no deseaba curvas en su cuerpo ni palabras que ella no hubiera creado” (*País*, 1999: 177).

Baltus never realises why Nena’s pregnancies startle her, he cannot see her confusion when she finds out that she is expecting. Lola does know but, for her, these are the types of thoughts that belong to women’s lives. They make Nena realise where the silences about her body lie. She does not know how to control pregnancy

and that depresses her because there she finds a silence that cannot be filled with words. Words abandon her after her third pregnancy. At the same time, the omniscient voice tells the reader how Nena's body does not recover after Ana's birth. The body loses the signification it had as mysterious, elegant, sensual, and beautiful and becomes empty of signification. Nena starts wearing the "camisones blancos de enferma" that become so recurrent in Amat's texts. The body is dying, it dies, but Nena's metaliterary self remains, as symbolised by the letter she starts to write when she arrives at the "sanatorio", a letter that is received after her death:

Hoy el mar me escucha mientras le hablo de amor. Tengo la sensación de que esta palabra me esconde secretos. No bajaré a la playa porque el mar no está siendo sincero conmigo y me lanza sal y espuma a través de la ventana.

Hoy las palabras han borrado el ímpetu hablador de mi libreta. Escribir en el aire es como leer un libro empezando por la última página. También tiene sentido. Es una lectura sobresaltada. Además, las palabras llegan más abajo.

Hoy me he despertado cuando el sol aún dormía y el cielo temblaba. Escribo en el mar. Hoy todavía sigo aquí. Y eso está bien. No puedo quejarme. Adónde iría. Adónde huir, Dios mío (*País*, 1999: 375).

3. WINDOWS OPENED TO NARRATIVE SPACES:
LANDSCAPES OBSERVED BY LITERARY SELVES

What speaks when 'I' speak to you? What are the institutional histories of subjection and subjectivation that 'position' me here now? (Butler, in Benhabib, Butler, et al. 1995: 41).

La escritura viene luego, después de muchos años de cilicio en cuartos tenebrosos y oscuros de escritura. Si es que de verdad el oficio de escribir logra venir un día y no es demasiado tarde ya para escribir o ser una escrita por el argumento de una novela (*Intimidad*, 1997: 67).

Quería obligarla a vivir. También él trataba de leer por la ventana (*País*, 1999: 372).

If Butler's quotation is read through the literary poetics expressed by the narrator of *La intimidad* in the second passage quoted above, the "institutional histories of subjection and subjectivation" can be considered to be the agents positioning a first-person narrative voice –not only a "me", i.e. an object, but also an 'I', a subject– in space ("here") and time ("now"). Amat is aware that literature can be regarded as an institution and she thematizes the places occupied in it not only by the female narrative voice but also by the female authorial voice. On the other hand, space and time are crucial concepts in Amat's writing. "La lectora" finished her quest thinking about having suicide as a continuous possibility. This was the result achieved after the time taken on her quest. Spatially, her quest finished when she reached a window opened to narrative scape, the window through which the authors

have been throwing themselves for centuries. The space of the window is repeated at several other instances throughout Amat's works. *La intimidación* happens between two windows. The final days of Nena Rocamora's life happen behind a window. In all cases, the window symbolically precedes the advent of the female literary-subject. The aim of this section is to explore the power of this symbolic dimension and unfold it to the full. Butler's questions are hypothetically unanswerable. Or rather, they are not posed to be answered but tested, and the momentary control over the answers resides precisely in the possibility of the continual re-testing that they require. For Judith Butler, an account of subjection in the sense of process of subject formation within the social matrix, which is what the *bildungsroman* ultimately is, can be regarded as the ultimate act of self-reflexivity. Both Amat and Butler test the notion of subject and explore the process of subject formation through a critical engagement with psychoanalysis, philosophy and, in the case of Amat, literature.¹² The "libros sin voz" revealed the space of literary memory as a sphere ultimately devoid of the order dictated by temporal and spatial configurations. Different literary texts appear reformulated under a new perspective of what is spatial and what is visual: this feature is shared by *La intimidación*. The narrator of *La intimidación* implicitly defines writing as a site, a *locus* of meaning that comes forward to the light, to the space of the page, after staying for a long time in the darkness. Memory is written, created, in

¹² One might wonder whether the discursive representation of space and the linear rendering of time have a politics or whether there is always a politics in the rendering of space and time that mirrors our perception of the ordinary. This is tantamount to considering whether it is possible to postulate a politics of literature as chaos or a metaliterary vision that reformulates the history of literature by disordering our perception of it, as was done in *Viajar es muy difícil*, *Monstruos*, and the rest of the books analysed in Part I.

the darkness of the mind, in the silence of thought, because what existed before the memory of the subject and narrator came into being, the mother in the case of the book, must still dwell in darkness or dark places: closets and attics. The chaos of the mind can only be brought into the real, codified, by going through a process of institutionalisation; and literature, although institutionalised, leaves room for the shadows.

The last quotation, from *El país del alma*, spoken by the omniscient voice that shares narrative space with two first-person narrators (Baltus Arnau and Nena Rocamora), refers to Baltus and interprets, in a metaliterary view, his attitude towards her death when her death cannot be avoided anymore. She is going to slide into memory, and become a silent text. He wants to make her live, but that is not possible anymore. Not only is it too late for her to write but also to be written “por el argumento de una novela”. The distance between Nena and her death narrows drastically when she goes to the “sanatorio”. This is symbolically indicated by what she does as soon as she gets into the room where she will die:

Nada más entrar en la habitación húmeda del sanatorio, Nena empezó a leer a través de la ventana (*País*, 1999: 344).

Reading “a través de la ventana” is the activity “la lectora” finishes her text with. At the end of *La intimidación*, it becomes apparent that the book can be read as a journey between two windows: the window of the psychiatric hospital, a window similar to Nena’s, and the window of the bedroom of a little girl, a bedroom similar

to Maite's. Spatial and temporal continuity is defied in *La intimidación* and, as the text continues, it can be stated that it produces in the reader a similar reaction to the one Foucault describes at the beginning of *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. After reading a passage by Borges,

toutes les familiarités de la pensée –de la nôtre: de celle qui a notre âge et notre géographie–, ébranlant toutes les surfaces ordonnées et tous les plans qui assagissent pour nous le foisonnement des êtres, faisant vaciller et inquiétant pour longtemps notre pratique millénaire du Même et de l'Autre (1996: 7).

Like Borges's narrators, Amat's are always defined by the exercise of literature and the narrator of *La intimidación*, to continue with Borges's imagery, uses the textual space of literature and the textual space she creates to find some kind of *aleph*.¹³ She knows she cannot be whole but there must be a momentary point that, as these two words suggest, unites time and space: all meanings, all locations, past, present and future, assembling a circular structure that can contain her universe and explain her subject position just momentarily because agency is not continuous but occasional. This initial impression of *La intimidación* changes when the book is read complementarily with *El país del alma*. In the same way that gynocriticism postulated the reading of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) as a book that filled in the silences of *Jane Eyre*, *El país del alma* and *La intimidación* can engage in a similar ontological game. This reading not only poses a generic challenge, a

¹³ Amat makes several references to the life and writings of Borges, e.g. "Las mujeres de Borges" in *Letra herida* (1998).

challenge to the stability of the novel as a finished text, but also, as will be discussed, a challenge to perceptions relating to gender.

The high degree of self-reflexivity that defines the discourse carried out by the main narrative voice of *La intimidación* is achieved by the selective use of literature. In this way, there are other texts and other writers within the text of the novel: *Jane Eyre*, the Bröntes, Carmen Laforet, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Pedro Páramo, Carles Riba, Charles Dickens, Jorge Luis Borges, J.V. Foix. Literature is reflected in the text and the text is literature therefore literature becomes self-reflexive too insofar as this is a metaliterary text. Consequently, the narrated self is literary because she literarizes her milieu and her process of identification is constructed through and within literature.¹⁴

La intimidación condenses elements and themes whose symbolism and recurrence can be explained by appealing to their treatment in the books analysed in Part I, amongst which are: the absence of the mother, the theme of women writers and writing about women, the infinite space of the library as a metaphor of knowledge, the conceptualisation of literature as journey, the fictionalisation of literary figures, the importance of personal space and the psychiatric hospital, the bed and, most importantly, the window. In this way, the self-reflexive nature of this novel gets consolidated by the repetition compulsion of certain literary *loci* of meaning that

¹⁴ The lack of cohesion the text of *Todos somos Kafka* displayed (unnumbered chapters with deceptively unrelated titles) is the main formal difference between the two texts. The narrators of both books share a similar ironic tone and the metaliterary quest undergone by “la lectora” is part of the search for literary knowledge the narrator of *La intimidación* undertakes.

are directly explained by literature, as the sphere of representation in which the subject emerges.

In many of her publications and relating it to analyses of gender, Butler states that intelligibility is just social. Consequently, it can be claimed that intelligibility is not psychic and it does not belong to the soul: it happens in the Real but it is not Symbolic. It depends on repetition compulsion and it is just social. The social will gain textual space in *El país del alma*. In *La intimidación*, intelligibility is constantly challenged, never settled, and the social, the Real, constantly displaced by the literary, the Symbolic. As in *Todos somos Kafka*, literature and madness are repeatedly related in *La intimidación*. In *El país del alma*, the word “locura” is hardly ever mentioned although what might be perceived as mental illness or neurosis is always present in Nena’s characterisation, and always subliminally related to the gap that lies between the reality of the character, her appearance as beautiful woman, and the narration of her poetic mind and her unfulfilled craving for exercising literature:

Ella parecía querer confundir frases con cosas. Decía: Voy a escribir una cosa. De ese modo, restando importancia al deseo literario, podía atreverse a fijar palabras en las hojas o en el viento. Las clavaba con agujas. Sus poemas eran como notas anónimas de admiración y suicidio. A fin de cuentas, el dolor era el mismo. Las cosas escritas podían tirarse a la papelera porque no eran más que cosas (*País*, 1999: 118).

Butler has defined agency as the gap between redundancy and repetition, and this is a definition that also suits the narrative poetics of Nuria Amat.¹⁵ In this way, literary agency is placed in the gap between the repetition of symbolic spaces like the library and the psychiatric hospital and the redundancy produced by their symbolic value, a significance sustained in the emergence of the subject through their literarization, i.e., their becoming metaliterary and intertextual. A first-person narrator is always partial and the female narrator of *La intimidación*, desperately searching, like “la lectora”, for literary agency is not an exception. A political unconscious is being laid bare throughout the text thus juxtaposing the partiality of the narrator to the central aim of theorists such as Butler: to reach some kind of truism about the self through an analysis of literature that can be defined as empirical. The word truism and not truth is meant to imply that any conceptualisation or definition will automatically become a site of contest, as the notion of a feminist subject is supposed to be.

Butler gives three prerequisites to the undertaking of a critical analysis of subjection and they establish a suitable conceptual frame to scrutinise subjection and metaliterature by bridging the gap between the general (culture, literature, the social) and the particular (the self, the psychic, the individual):

¹⁵ Butler’s preoccupation with censorship is a logical consequence of the emphasis she places on the signifying and therefore productive power of words and on the possibility of enforcing or subverting that power. By relating implicit censorship with discursive agency and defining the space of agency as “the gap between redundancy and repetition” (Butler 1997: 129), identity issues and textuality as a discursive manifestation are confronted. The question of agency is directly related to Butler’s postulation of the topological beginnings of subject formation. She characterises the notion of the subject not only as a necessary fiction but also as an artistic accomplishment, a trope that shall develop an ‘I’ that would stand over time. The subject is constantly on the move, always in a state of accomplishment and loss, never quite existing but perpetuating a need to exist, satisfying the desire to be social, human, to be signified, to possess social coherence. It is always unstable.

A critical analysis of subjection involves: (1) an account of the way regulatory power maintains subjects in subordination by producing and exploiting the demand for continuity, visibility, and place; (2) recognition that the subject produced as continuous, visible, and located is nevertheless haunted by an inassimilable remainder, a melancholia that marks the limits of subjectivation; (3) an account of the iterability of the subject that shows how agency might well consist in opposing and transforming the social terms by which it is spawned (1997: 29).

Initially, these three postulates can be compared to the three prerequisites that any discipline needs to fulfil in order to be considered as scientific according to positivism: (1) to have a method of study; (2) to isolate a clear object of study; (3) that the discipline is immanent, i.e. that the language of the method suits the object's existence in isolation. Having already stated that the *bildungsroman* involves an analysis of subjection, then the metaliterary *bildungsroman* appears as the most critical textual possibility of narrating the genealogy of the subject. The interesting feature of the narrator of *La intimidación*, and a feature shared with the narrative voice of *Todos somos Kafka*, is that they gain agency, immanence, by "opposing and transforming" what could be considered as literary rather than social elements. The absence of the mother in the novel, a fact loaded with psychoanalytical symbolism, causes Nuria, the narrator, to be, generally speaking, a melancholic subject and conditions the unfulfilment of her desire for "continuity, visibility, and place".¹⁶ In *Letra herida*, Amat defines the activity of reading as an act of dialogue with the dead (1998: 15). This was the theme of *Todos somos Kafka* and this is what the narrator of *La intimidación* does while she aims at experiencing the contingency of being whole, knowing, as she does, that that experience would only be fictitious, fake –a mirage.

¹⁶ Ortega (1997) suggests that the novel exhibits a dialogic dimension with former theorists that have dealt with melancholia, such as Robert Burton and Julia Kristeva.

And a product of literature, therefore metaliterary. In this way, “the subject is the linguistic occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility, the linguistic condition of its existence and agency” (Butler 1997: 11) and this is achieved only at the end of the book and for a lapse of time so brief that the textual space stops whilst sending the reader back into its circular structure:

Tras los cristales descubro movimiento. Una niña con blusa de color claro, rebeca roja y flequillo mal cortado se asoma a la ventana y me mira. Me observa detenidamente. Lo mismo que yo a ella, que la miro con dulzura. Una nube que pasa. La niña se llama Nuria. Así es como la llaman cuando le dicen Nuria, apártate de la ventana. Como si el hecho de mirar por la ventana fuera peligroso. En cualquier momento, por la ventana de enfrente puede caer una señora y matarse. No se lo dicen, pero la niña ya lo sabe. Por eso mira como si descreyera. En cualquier momento puede aparecer y desaparecer su madre. Todo puede suceder cuando nunca sucede nada. [...] La vida es un libro abierto en un manicomio. Una ventana que se abre y la muerte entra por ella (*Intimidad*, 1997: 284-285).

The importance of the window as a space open to narration is also expressed by Nena, in words that could have been spoken by the woman looking towards the girl that could be or have been her. She describes the same activity:

Por fin he aprendido a leer por la ventana. No necesito nada en las manos. Éste es un desafío contra el cielo (*País*, 1999: 362).

In both cases, the windows are symbolic elements opened to narrative spaces and the subjects looking are not real, they only exist in the mind or in the symbolic level of the text because this is not a text that narrates reality or the social through the eyes of a narrator. From this perspective, the displacement of the social by the literary is thus taken to the extreme. The ending of *El país del alma* is very significant in this aspect:

Cuando yo deje de ser, la mitad de vuestra memoria dejará de ser, dijo ella.
Y si yo dejara de ser, todo el recuerdo dejaría de ser, pensó él.
Ella y él eran palabras desencajadas. Chocaban entre sí para inventar algo que decir con ellas. Se resistían a vivir y a morir separadas.
Sí. Entre la pena y la nada, elegimos la pena, dijeron las palabras (*País*, 1999: 375-376).

In *La intimidad*, the ultimate point of observation from which a world (the text) is going to be observed and depicted is the window of the narrator's room: Nuria's window. The window has two sides and two images of the same self. Indeed, the window can be considered a reformulation of a real mirror image. From it, a very special view can be observed, a view of "delirio y melancolía" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 9), which is ultimately the view she offers of her life: the text. Still, it is a privileged spot –"la ventana de mi cuarto era privilegiada" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 9)– although it does not receive much sunlight. The sunny rooms are the rooms of her father and brothers but the narrator apparently feels more comfortable in the shadows, like Jane Eyre did. The sun did not seem to be necessary in childhood but the street noises and what went on in the psychiatric hospital were, to the extent that these will remain constant throughout the writing of the "cuaderno vital de mi existencia" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 10): her intertextual and self-reflexive text.

When she finally manages to see herself from outside seeing, at the same time, the other side of the window or her window from outside, her vision, now the Other, has crossed the street and is at the other side of the road. This is the side of the madwomen, the side of the psychiatric hospital and from it, she sees again,

La ventana de mi dormitorio. Ese cuadrilátero grande aparecía tan imponente, claro y abierto al mundo como la cima de un volcán. Provocativa (*Intimidad*, 1997: 254).

There are then two views of the same spot. The window of her room is the place where her voice has been located. The two views of the same spot can only be justified by it being literary or, rather, part of the textual space. Like closets and attics, it is situated in the periphery of the house and can be considered as an arbitrary intersection point between the social and the psychic also being a point within the sphere of the testimonial, the sphere in which the text occurs. The windows are important, the gaze between Nuria and the woman, written by Nuria who eventually goes to the other window: to madness. The reader knows she has been there and might well still be. Awareness of the self cannot be separated from madness. The contemplation of the self through literary mirrors leads to insanity. Furthermore, the narrator writes: madness and literature go together. She writes unreadable texts instead of writing like Dickens and perpetuating his vision of the domestic sphere, as her father wanted. Baltus fails to see precisely that his own vision of the domestic sphere is not enough for Nena either, hence her tedium.

The end of *La intimidad*, end only in the sense of the last paragraph that finishes the book but not forecloses the plot, i.e. literary agency, is suicide. Symbolically speaking, suicide affirms and denies identity. By dying and denying the self, she forces the reader to read her death and interpret it. The narrative implications of the critically consolidated death of the author were already discussed

in the first chapter of Part I. In this respect, it can be declared that *La intimidad* can be read as the text written from the window when suicide keeps on being an option. Suicide is placed in the life of the narrator in the same way Amat places the option of suicide in the lives of writers, such as Foucault or Kafka, who have lived any form of exile (Letra, 1998: 80). The process of female subjectivity narrated in *El país del alma* has a double relationship with *La intimidad*. This two-fold relationship can be explained by resorting to the relationship between gender and genre. From a generic perspective, the figure of Nena Rocamora can be retrospectively read in the silence the deceased mother is in *La intimidad*. Baltus's sadness can also be read in the anonymous father of the female narrator of *La intimidad*. The final image we get of the narrator, at the same time as her name, Nuria, is revealed, definitely consolidates the climate of vagueness that has characterised the plot of the book throughout. And who is Nuria? Is the girl with the "flequillo mal cortado" the same "bruja encorsetada" of the beginning of the novel? As will be explained, she, "bruja encorsetada" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 16), has never had the chance of learning how to perform femininity. Is she the woman who writes "Ahora es el momento, tal vez, de abrir la ventana y caer de nuevo" (*Intimidad*, 1997: 285)? The ultimate answer is that Nuria is not. She lacks a biography. What becomes apparent at this point is that the narration stems from madness or, rather, from lack of sanity along with and within literary (dis)order. A return to childhood is produced through madness (*Intimidad*, 1997: 237, 240), hence the circular structure of the novel. It can be argued that this circular structure joins together, at the end, the self and its double: the little girl that

was narrated by “the madwoman in the attic” finally is fully reflected by “the madwoman in the attic” that narrates the little girl.¹⁷ Otherness has then been fully experienced. Both the girl and the woman have shared narrative agency and it is impossible to know whether they are one or two. Sharing a process of signification and asserting identity through it only to make identity paradoxical, i.e. non-assertive, implies seeing the subject as a site of contest and in the case of the female subject summons the ontological relationship between author-narrator to the scene. As Ana María Moix states, in Amat

no sólo se aúnan y confunden los materiales procedentes de la experiencia y los surgidos del ámbito de la ficción, es decir, de lo vivido y de lo inventado: además, tanto experiencia como ficción se nutren de una tercera realidad, la literatura, en la que acaban trascendiéndose (1997: 16).

This act of transcendence is what Amat has termed “metaliteratura” (*Letra*, 1998: 171).

The relationship between gender and genre, both concepts that support politics of representation, conditions the textual construction of Nena Rocamora’s development by underconstructing a subtext that characterises her symbolically. It could be claimed that the self that is conscious of itself is not split (binary) but multiple, and that this is what self-consciousness ultimately is: the awareness of a totality that is not single or whole but multiple. Still, to sustain multiplicity in the real, it is necessary to produce a knowledge of the self as necessary other: binary

¹⁷ The reference to Gilbert & Gubar’s text, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), recently translated and published in Spain under the title *La loca en el desván*, is obvious.

logic or logic of the one? In fiction, neither one, nor the other. What *La intimidación* offers is a climate of vagueness because Nuria cannot imagine reality and cannot write it either:

Yo no quería creerlo pero tenía que admitir la posibilidad de que aquella señora tal vez fuese mi madre, pues era lo más parecido a la idea que me habían inculcado de ella. Una señora que me observaba en silencio. Ello explicaba que viviéramos tan cerca de la clínica, casi pegados a ella, para que pudiera vernos. Y, como era natural, la única forma que tenía yo de comunicarme con mi posibilidad de madre era la lectura de libros y la ventana privilegiada (*Intimidación*, 1997: 60).

And in *El país del alma*, Nena's mind phrases the wish of communicating with her daughters through the window:

Dejó que las niñas pusieran a flotar su felicidad en la superficie nebulosa del agua. Las vería jugar a través de su ventana. Lo importante eran ellas. Verlas crecer a través de la ventana. De ese modo consiguió aligerar la tristeza de su cara, para que cuando llegue Baltus no me vea (*País*, 1999: 347).

The narrative present in *La intimidación* hardly exists because it merges with suicide. In fact, the narrator never does reach the awareness from which narration should originate. The present is a space of time so small that it has to be imagined, isolated from the past and the future. It is a construction, like the subject. *El país del alma* could be retrospectively read as the text of this present, but only in retrospect, reading backwards as Nena suggests (*País*, 1999: 375), reading the air or reading without holding a book. Instead of reaching a present of awareness and understanding, the female voice of *La intimidación* reaches an understanding of

madness, thus subverting the basic principle of the *bildungsroman*: writing from a present of awareness.

From a psychoanalytical and feminist perspective, it is precisely the subtextual and more symbolic space which is the locus that supports her characterisation.¹⁸ As regards Nena's characterisation, the gap between what we are reading and what is not disclosed can only be understood by appealing to genderisation. In this way, the almost inevitable genderisation of character is revealed, a feature that remained in the textual silence of *La intimidación*, because it belonged to the mother and went away, stopped signifying, with her. The relationship between melancholy and genderisation is inaugurated in this way. *El país del alma* strengthens the relationship between melancholia and the acquisition of gender identity by subliminally narrating the psychic effects of the progressive inscription of gendered roles in the body. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁸ The subtext has been defined as follows:

sub-text The 'under' or 'below' text; what is not said or done. The term has a wide application to literature in general; particularly, perhaps, to the novel and short story, and other fictional genres, and to poetry. A reader tends to construct a sub-text for herself or himself, imagining or interpreting what is *not* said or *not* done (and *how* it is not said or done), what may be implied, suggested or hinted, what is ambiguous, marginal, ambivalent, evasive, emphasized or not emphasized – and so on. In doing all this, the reader exercises insight into the 'unconscious' elements in the work itself and thus elicits additional meanings. Psychoanalytical criticism involves a quest for such concealed or partially concealed meanings (Cuddon 1991: 931).

CHAPTER 3:

Cuerpo desnudo blanco:

THE NOVEL THAT NEVER WAS, ALL THE NOVELS THAT HAVE BEEN (SO FAR)

1. BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND NARRATIVE,

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN GENDER AND GENRE

–Para comprender mejor lo que está en juego debemos regresar a un fragmento clave de la novela *Ulyses*. En ella, Stephen Dedalus reflexiona sobre un tema que también es importante para Homero: la naturaleza de la paternidad. “La paternidad” –afirma Stephen– “puede ser una ficción legal”. ¿Quién es el padre de cualquier hijo para que cualquier hijo le ame o él ame a cualquier hijo? (*Pat's*, 1997: 40).¹

Pat is the main character of Amat's sole play for the theatre, *Pat's Room*. In the quotation given above, she is speaking to a policeman in her room in the *Hotel de mala mort*, where there has just been a murder. The man that has been killed, like Pat's father, is, of course, a writer. She is in the company of her imaginary dog “Beckett” and blames the mother, a librarian, for the murder of the writer. His death,

¹ Manuscript provided by the author. *Pat's Room* was performed on 17 September 1997 in Barcelona (Sala Beckett) but has not been published.

for Pat, can only be explained by reading *Ulysses*. The policeman suspects that Pat has killed the man. Being the daughter who has inherited the texts, some real some imaginary, of a suicidal father that jumped out of the window, she thinks of the recently murdered man as she thinks about the death of her own father. Can they be the same author? And who is Pat? The opening stage direction explains all that it is necessary to know about her:

En el escenario hay una cama, una ventana, una puerta. También un ordenador portátil o equipo tecnológico similar. Son los elementos más significativos de la obra. Deben ser grandes y desnudos. Todo sucede en una habitación de hotel. Tercer o cuarto piso. Teléfono visiblemente descolgado. Luz matinal, la ventana en el centro del escenario, casi como un altar o una segunda casa. La ventana es en sí misma un personaje secundario. Debe permitir que la mujer que está en escena pueda actuar detrás de la ventana. La mujer tiene alrededor de los cuarenta años, pero con un claro aspecto infantiloides. Se llama Pat. Pat es una ex suicida reincidente. Durante toda la obra Pat viste una especie de camisón blanco de algodón, como de enferma de hospital psiquiátrico. La habitación es austera aunque luminosa. Debe permitir que el espectador observe cierta ambigüedad con el cuarto de un manicomio. La ex suicida padece la obsesión de lanzarse por esta ventana y matarse. Suicidio por imitación, llaman los expertos (Pat's, 1997: 1).

This setting is similar to the end of *Todos somos Kafka* and also bears some resemblance to the windows of *La intimidad* and the windows scattered here and there in *El país del alma* and the “libros sin voz”. The configuration of the ‘I’ within the text, not only in the form of a narrative voice but also under the stimulus of a possible authorial incidence, is a key theme in Amat’s works. This authorial incidence is similar to the role of an omniscient narrator who controls the story but whose authority, as is the case with *El país del alma* and *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, can be justified and is conditioned by a previous role within the plot. *Pat’s Room*,

like *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* –both unpublished– somehow condenses the exploration of the real and symbolic ‘I’ Amat has treated from so many different angles throughout her work. *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* displays both strands, authorial and narrative, third and first person: authorial interpretation of character and plot is expressed in the form of a third-person narrator who alternates with the I-ness of the narrator, Esther. This omniscient voice cannot be interpreted as the voice of the dead narrator interpreting her own story, as was discussed in the second section of the previous chapter in relation to the omniscient voice in *El país del alma*, who could be read as the voice of the dead Nena. *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* also has a first- and a third-person narrative voice. The two types of discourse exhibited in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* are more closely related to the two types of discourse contained in the play. Both texts merge subjectivity and subjectivisation. The stage directions of *Pat’s Room*, like the one cited above, give us succinct information about the features that justify the discourse uttered by Pat. The particularity of form is similar to *El país del alma*, but only apparently. Both *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* and *Pat’s Room* give insights into elements of other works, especially the novels.

Cuerpo desnudo blanco, written before *Pan de boda*, can be more accurately considered a subtext and an expression of the unconscious symbolic value of *topoi* that will be recurrently developed. The unconscious knows no negation and is the site of causality. This does not mean that there is a cause-effect relationship between this early text and the ones that followed but, rather, that the representative potential

of this text emerges and stays in the gap between what textually exists –Amat’s bibliography– and what can be interpreted or discussed about it.

The plot of *La intimidación* was already being written in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* and the author returned to the unpublished text when she was writing *La intimidación*.² It is possible to assume that she returned to the unpublished text at least once more: the short story “Cuerpo” (in *Amor breve*, 1990: 125-127) is taken from the unpublished novel. On the other hand, the organisation of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* is similar to the way in which the chapters of *Todos somos Kafka* are distributed: unnumbered chapters, but, as opposed to the novel of “la lectora”, not such deceptively unrelated titles. The chapters entitled “El hijo comido” (75-81), “El hombre comido” (98-102) and “El padre comido” (148) focus on issues of problematic masculinity. This chapter will analyse *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* as an open frame which infiltrates itself into the reading of all other works and brings to light aspects that would otherwise have remained hidden, such as the analysis of male homosexual panic and the feminist implications of the recurrent death of the mother. Under this rationale, this chapter is basically dedicated to these two figures: the father and the mother, but in abstract, reading them not so much as signifiers but as signified, not so much part of the Real as part of the Symbolic, i.e. of a narrative poetics.

The final text is formally framed by two things: the word “novela” between brackets in the subtitle and Amat’s “Advertencia al lector” on the last page:

² The author acknowledged the referential importance of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* when she offered the manuscript and allowed me to quote from it.

Esta novela es el resultado de un manuscrito que escribí hace veinte años. En verdad desconozco el motivo que me ha empujado a trabajar nuevamente estas páginas y darles una cara nueva, lavada y desbrozada. He preferido conservar su espontaneidad antes de que la tibia sequedad de una posible madurez literaria la pueda envolver con la pátina grave y sesuda que se supone merecen las novelas (*Cuerpo*: 174).

The main themes of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* and arguably the most relevant theme of Amat are female subjectivity and/ or subjectivisation. It can be considered the most self-reflexive text of Amat. Unpublished texts often reach the critic after all the published texts of the writer have been read and some critical work has been undertaken. As a result, the reading of the unpublished text is conditioned by the critical memory the reader has already constructed. There seems to be a metaliterary agenda in most of Amat's texts, although it is not always expressed through the same rationale and receives different treatments depending on the genre adopted or defied in the book in question.

It can be said that there is a sense of fragmentation in this text, possibly due to the fact that it has not been published. It could be considered a broken text reproducing the broken content of a mind or a text reproducing the *oeuvre*, as Barthes understood it. Roland Barthes pioneered the idea of viewing Literature (with a capital 'L') as a concept in permanent tension with the concept of textuality. The written word can therefore be scrutinized from two different angles that correspond to two different ways of theorising literature: according to the classic notion of a *work* (*oeuvre*) and the modern notion of a *text*. The former appears as a "closed, finished, reliable, representational *object*", the latter can be considered "an open,

infinite process that is both meaning-generating and meaning-subverting” (Johnson, in Lentricchia & McLaughlin 1995 [1990]: 40). The feminist appropriation of Barthes has focused on his concept of textuality: “while Literature is seen as a series of discrete and highly meaningful Great Works, textuality is the manifestation of an open-ended, heterogeneous, disruptive force of signification and erasure that transgresses all closure –a force that is operative even within the Great Works themselves” (40). Not being finished, i.e., ready for publication, the text is not regulated by frames but by frame-breaking, one of the defining features of metafiction, as discussed by Waugh who relates metafiction to frame-breaking, taking into account that contemporary metafiction is built on the assumption that framing is a problem both in the construction of the real world and in the worlds of fiction:

the first problem it [i.e. frame-breaking] poses, of course, is: what is a ‘frame’? What is the ‘frame’ that separates reality from ‘fiction’? Is it more than the front and back covers of a book, the rising and lowering of a curtain, the title and ‘The End’? (1984: 28).

The use of a first- and a third-person voice in this unpublished text somehow establishes a separation between reality and fiction by fracturing a metafictional crevasse that separates Esther’s interpretation of herself and the relationship with reality (first person) with the fiction created on Esther and on certain aspects of her world (third person). Similarly, we have stage directions in *Pat’s Room* (third-person mould) and Pat’s discourse of dead mothers, dead fathers and metaliterature (first-

person). Hutcheon offered in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980) a description of the state of affairs in novelistic creation. She defines modern metafiction as “a mimesis of process” (1980: 5). This mimesis grows out of an “interest in consciousness as well as the objects of consciousness that constitutes the ‘psychological realism’ of Woolf, Gide, Svevo, and Proust at the beginning of the century” (5). Waugh states that nearly all contemporary experimental writing reveals some explicitly metafictional strategies. Furthermore,

any text that draws the reader’s attention to its process of construction by frustrating his or her conventional expectations of meaning and closure problematizes more or less explicitly the ways in which narrative codes –whether ‘literary’ or ‘social’– artificially construct apparently ‘real’ and imaginary worlds in the terms of particular ideologies while presenting these as transparently ‘natural’ and ‘eternal’ (1984: 22).

Cuerpo desnudo blanco draws the attention of the reader to the archaeology of Amat’s narrative poetics insofar as the themes obsessively recreated in her other texts are there. Waugh, like other narratologists, is focusing her attention on the metafictional level of a text. For her, narrative codes are important because they express an ideology. However, given that within Amat’s recent narrative, it is possible to separate the literary from the social in favour of the literary, one might wonder whether the real and imaginary worlds presented in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* correspond to Freud’s definition of psychosis, given in his Lecture XXXI, “The Anatomy of the Mental Personality”, as something that exists prior to the awareness of subjectivity understood therefore as awareness of the structure of the self:

If we throw a crystal to the ground, it breaks but it does not break haphazard; in accordance to the lines of cleavage it falls into fragments, whose limits were already determined by the structure of the crystal, although they were invisible. Psychotics are fissured and splintered structures such as these (Freud 1946 [1933]: 80).

Cuerpo desnudo blanco has a formal line of cleavage between Esther's representation of herself and the characterisation produced by the omniscient voice. So the text is formally "broken". What transpires at the level of content? What happens to the female subject that is in charge of her own subjectivisation and what happens to the female subject narrated by a third-person voice? The third person narrator solely narrates Esther. It makes sense of her, illuminates many of the aspects Esther leaves out. Esther focuses on her relationship with the brother and the father and also narrates how she builds her own image of the mother. The omniscient narrator represents Esther's subjectivity further.

The concept of representation is essential in the analysis of all of Amat's texts. Freud's definition of psychosis implies assuming the existence of a desire for unity as far as representation goes. It can be claimed that the unbroken crystal –and therefore the finished text– is offering just a mirage of unity, of completeness, which hides the lines of cleavage that, as individual structures, psychotics have, according to Freud. The ambiguous representation instigated by the use of first- and third-person narrative voices shyly touches upon one of Amat's most recurrent themes: the relationship between memory and the acts of reading and writing, which appears in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, exists, but in an embryonic state, directly connected to the

ambiguous representation instigated by the use of first- and a third- person narrative voices.

In the section meaningfully entitled “Contarlo todo” (*Cuerpo*: 132), Esther narrates a death of her father, one of the many that Amat’s works will narrate: he does not die after all, just momentarily in her imagination. This imagined death causes a nervous breakdown and impels her decision to be psychoanalysed. Rewriting her memory seems to be the aim of the therapy and this causes a certain sadness: as an effect of medication “echaba en falta esas entretenidas fugas y me afligía la pérdida repentina de mi cuidada memoria desaparecida” (*Cuerpo*: 141). That “cuidada memoria” has not merely disappeared. Esther has momentarily put it on hold. Stopping its influence is an effort of her will expected by her therapist. The reward for that effort is being able to get to the end of the treatment and apparently fooling the therapist as to her fake sanity. Esther reproduces his words, full of psychiatric stereotypical commonplaces:

Luego él (como distraído pasajero): “Señorita, ¿cuántas veces tengo que repetirle que usted no padece ninguna enfermedad mental? Simplemente sufre una inadaptación (¿al molde?, ¿a la concha?, ¿a las pinzas de mis alas?), muy corriente en la actualidad. Ya le dije que atribuye demasiada importancia a hechos insustanciales; cualquier teoría la convierte en drama y creo que todo cuanto de terrible ha pensado y sufrido en su vida no tiene otra causa que este inconsciente deseo que la impulsa a herir a su padre, al que por otra parte adora con exageración. Sus problemas se han debido a esas vueltas y vueltas que no para de dar sobre usted misma. ¿Por qué no intenta abrir el campo de sus intereses? Preocúpese de la vida en general, de la historia de lo cotidiano” (*Cuerpo*: 142).

The irony lies in the fact that precisely in order to go through the therapy process, Esther has had to open up “el campo de sus intereses cotidianos” so that she

could attend the sessions with topics already prepared thus avoiding the embarrassing silence that their appointments would have turned into had she not given him what he wanted. In *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, the figure of the psychiatrist is part of a bigger symbolic entity that operates at a structural level in relation to other works by Amat: the masculine other. Esther, being obliged to talk to him, proposed:

hombre / mujer / sexo / energía sensitiva / puritanismo europeo / trauma / minusvalidez / cuerpo / fibras emotivas / trabajo motriz / individuo / el amor / la represión / mente / cuerpo / músculos / sensibilidad / etcétera: superflua oratoria pero al cabo útil para ser dirigida a un auditorio barrigón y obviamente empachado de sesiones rutinarias (*Cuerpo*: 142).

Amat's early novels progress towards narrating the story of everyday life in a discourse that is not metafictional. The desire for metafiction is always present in Amat. It is going to become part of the *psyche* of her female characters and the psychiatrist will also become a recurrent figure. In *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, there is a mimetic relationship with the psychoanalytical discipline that exposes the working of gender, hence the dialogic interaction with the masculine other, a theme subtly developed in more recent novels such as *La intimidación* and subtly explored in Amat's more theoretical works such as *Viajar es muy difícil*.

Following Foucault, gender theorists like Butler (1990) or de Lauretis (1987) have approached psychoanalysis genealogically, as the descendant of the scientific discourse of medicine and psychiatry. Also very Foucauldian in her approach to literature and in the treatment of themes of subject construction, the analyses of the female *psyche* most of Amat's texts incorporate display points of contact particularly

with the work of Butler who has extensively dealt with theories of subject formation. If psychoanalysis started because of the willingness of female patients to be analysed, Amat's writing is rooted in the willingness of female subjects to narrate their subjectivity as a *tropos*, a linguistic occasion of becoming.

When she tells the father she has been psychoanalysed, at the same time, Esther lets the reader know what it is that she felt she had to leave out of the sessions: exactly the same thing she omits to say in her dialogue with the father, namely the influence of literature in her observation of the self:³

(con ello quería decir que estábamos los bellos y los malditos, los desnudos y los muertos, los negros y los blancos, los sonidos y las furias, los rojos y los negros, la tempestad y las olas, pero tenía que huir de embaucadores apelativos literarios, ya que una referencia apócrifa habrá enturbiado la argumentación que por encima de todo pretendía ser convincente) (*Cuerpo*: 146).

The parentheses that frame this quotation answer to the frequent use of interpolation in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*. An account of subjection, in this case Esther's, is thus traced not only in the turning against herself that the narration offers but also in the turning against a 'you'. Butler affirms that "the analysis of subjection is always double, tracing the conditions of subject formation and tracing the turn against those conditions for the subject –and its perspective– to emerge" (1997: 29). The parts of the novel that are written in the first-person have an addressee that influences

³ In *La intimidación* (1997), the dialogue between father and daughter is going to be influenced by the library the father already owns and the library the daughter has to create and to connect or separate from his. In *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, there is one reference, made by Esther herself and not by the omniscient narrator, to the library owned by the father: "[...] los libros, la biblioteca: la única isla feliz de mi infeliz infancia" (*Cuerpo*: 104).

Esther's act of self-reproach, conscience, and melancholia, acts that work in tandem with processes of social regulation at the level of the real and with the processes that regulate this (sub)text at the level of the symbolic.

The implicit 'you' that the first-person parts of the book address themselves to is a problematical entity. No conventional expectations of meaning and closure apply to it. Only one thing is clear: the addressee is always a masculine other. It is either the father, the brother, or Marcos, Esther's partner when she is an adult. In the case of the episode in which Esther narrates her therapy, the addressee is the brother, a key figure in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*. The novel, as has been already mentioned, shares more features with later works. The polyphony that sustains the poetic tone in *El país del alma* (1999) is present in Amat's unpublished text in a less refined way. There are also metaliterary hints in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*: Esther, the protagonist, represses them like Maite does. She is not a fully metaliterary character in the sense that the narrator of *La intimidación* or Nena Rocamora are. None of the female characters of Amat's early novels was either. However, all of them are near what one may consider emotional instability or neurosis. Their texts make them logical.

2. TEXTUAL SILENCE AND (MALE) HOMOSEXUAL PANIC

IN CUERPO DESNUDO BLANCO AND LA INTIMIDAD

Pánico homosexual: Miedo profundo, interiorizado, de la homosexualidad que se produce al reconocer el individuo en sí mismo la clase de deseos que le están vedados por el sistema social. En ocasiones la reacción es la violencia homofóbica contra los homosexuales, con el fin de afirmar la propia virilidad. En otros casos, la culpa se interioriza y da lugar a síntomas físicos similares a otros casos de paranoia. [...] el pánico homosexual presupone homosexualidad y en ocasiones aparece junto a manifestaciones no reprimidas de la misma: el relato de Henry James *La bestia de la selva* es un ejemplo de pánico homosexual, y en obras como *El público*, de Federico García Lorca encontramos esta relación de horror e identificación que se relaciona con este concepto (Mira 1999: 550-551).

As Kosofsky Sedgwick puts forward in the textual analyses undertaken in *Between Men* (1985) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), the presence of homosexual panic in literature is very much related to processes of interiorisation. The narration of the “síntomas físicos” Mira mentions in the definition taken from *Para entendernos. Diccionario de cultura homosexual, gay y lésbica* are part of the textual manifestation of the panic, a manifestation that demands decoding for it lies in textual silence, in the same way that it can be hidden in the closet. Anxiety and melancholy are two symptoms Melanie Klein associated with paranoia itself. For Freud, paranoia in men resulted from the repression of homosexual desire. Since the mentally healthy man had to repress homosexual desire, that is to say, turn it into an illusion, paranoia could be expected. The virility of the main masculine character of *La intimidad*, the father, is never asserted by his daughter, the androgynous narrator

of this *bildungsroman*. What she will repeatedly assert is his melancholy and his ambiguity, an ambiguity that mirrors hers.

Both *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* and *La intimidación* are, as novels, processes of literarization written in the first person by female voices that, being problematically gendered, will write texts that render gender problematic. The character of the father is, from an epistemological perspective, the same being in the two books. Both texts obsessively elaborate on his melancholy and on the influence the death of the mother has had on the identity of the characters of both the father and the daughter, and on the almost inevitable genderisation they, as narrative characters, are supposed to undergo. The mother's death has not implied a death of femininity but seems to have enhanced the femininity in the figure of the father and has textually rendered his own masculinity problematic at the level of the social. In both texts, he is the character that tries and fails to teach the narrator to be a girl. Characteristics culturally associated with the feminine world therefore belong to him.

The relationship between textual silence and male homosexual panic can be read in a published text, in this case in the novel *La intimidación*, when homosexuality is indeed repressed. Although Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle" can be read as an unrepressed manifestation, this reading implies in fact teasing out homosexual panic from the text, as Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests in her interpretation of James's piece in the chapter "The Beast in The Closet" of her already classic *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) to which Mira refers in the prologue of his dictionary. This conceptual act of teasing out homosexual panic from within the politics of

representation of a text and of a male character is required in order to analyse the narrator's view of the father as a closeted subject. In doing so, my aim is to make sense of the problematic relationship existing between the two protagonic characters of *La intimidación*, a relationship narrated by Amat in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*. The father's permanent state of mourning in *La intimidación* is always linked by the narrator to his having failed to fulfil the role of husband rather than having lost it because of his wife's death. Additionally, his more feminine traits make the house in which they live look as if there was a woman living in it. Through these features, the narrator puts forward the idea that being a man is not unproblematic.

When writing *La intimidación*, Amat returned to *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*. The similarities and discrepancies between these two texts are more than just formal or thematic. There is in fact an epistemological relationship between the two books insofar as the formal or thematic gap between the texts signifies. *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* works as a closeted text for *La intimidación*. In order to know more about *La intimidación*, to analyze it and understand it better, *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* works as an epistemological tool. Both texts present a female narrator living in similar family structures, both narrators become privileged observers of "el trasfondo del armario del padre" (*Cuerpo*: 6).

Silence defines the relationship between the two texts. *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* is silenced in *La intimidación* and *La intimidación* has silenced *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*. The notions of textual silence and of homosexual panic and the relationship between them emerge all the more clearly when the two texts are juxtaposed and

commented on together. From this perspective, the figures of the father and the daughter in both *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* and *La intimidación* can be read as two single organisms expanding over two texts and also subliminally present in other works of Amat. The relationship between father and daughter, a very problematic one, can be explained further by resorting to the unpublished text. There are instances in both *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* and *La intimidación* where the gap between what the narrator is telling and what she is not disclosing can only be understood by appealing to the notion of textual silence, homosexual panic, the relationship between both concepts and also the relationship between the two texts.

The melancholic relationship between father and daughter is strange and estranged, loaded with silences and marked by the imaginary dialogue both of them maintain with the literary canon that dwells in their respective libraries. The female voice that is going to lead the reader to the father shares therefore with him a common sphere of endless representation: literature. Both characters read themselves in books continuously. Their lives are acts of reading and reading defines them. In this way, the highly metaliterary tissue that constructs the texts published before *La intimidación* is also present in the novel, but serving somewhat a synthetic function for *La intimidación* condenses themes recurrently treated in Amat's previous books while expanding them within a narrative frame. Amat privileges the figures of androgynous female subjects and makes them spectators of males whose gender identity is as problematic, paradoxical, contradictory as the one of the voice that narrates. The relationship between the emergence of an androgynous narrator and the death of the

mother, the presence of a voice that tends to avoid being gendered and the presence of genderisation in a female subject that is absent from reality, though not absent from representation, implements the act of textually silencing a gendered self that will be rearticulated in *El país del alma*.

In *Viajar es muy difícil*, Amat communicates the critical and hermeneutic potentiality of looking for the textual silences of history of literature. Writers are then given narrative voice to tell the silences of their canonical biographies. Under this rationale, a fictitious encounter between Constantine Cavafy and Paul Bowles is narrated. The eyes of the old poet Cavafy meet the curious glance of young Bowles in a Turkish bath. They do not talk. Cavafy is leaving and Bowles is staying, the former is old and the latter is young. As Mark Lily points out, in Cavafy's poetry "it is not merely that the most excited and impassioned relationships are brief: we also see that their end can be poignantly sudden" (1993: 43) and, as the poem included in Amat's book shows, the end may actually prevent the beginning of a love relationship that Amat imbues with literature. Cavafy, literary father of Bowles, is symbolically abandoning the living landscape of literature. The end of his life is near but not the death of his voice for he passes his words to the young author. A piece of paper with verses composed by the old poet for the then young novelist reaches him via the hands of Turkish men. The poem reads,

Bajando por aquella escalera,
junto a la puerta nos cruzamos, y por un instante
Vi tu cara desconocida y tú me viste.
Yo me oculté en las sombras, y
pasaste rápidamente, alejándote,

y te perdiste en aquella casa vulgar
 donde no encontrarías el placer, como tampoco yo habría de hallarlo.
 Y sin embargo el amor que deseabas yo lo tenía para dártelo
 el amor que yo deseaba, tus ojos me lo ofrecían
 con su ambigüedad y abandono.
 Los cuerpos se sentían y se buscaban;
 La sangre y la piel comprendían.

Pero turbados los dos nos escondíamos (*Viajar*, 1995: 109-110).

This poem illustrates the role of male writers in the configuration of Amat's narrative poetics of which *La intimidad* is a decisive exponent. The fictionalisation of literary figures is a recurrent theme in Amat. The relationship between Bowles and Cavafy is just one example of it. Kafka, Joyce, Calvino, Borges, Proust and Foucault are some of the literary fathers appearing in Amat's prose. For Woods, Cavafy's poetry deals so explicitly with sexual desire that "his insistence on visual beauty is entirely consistent with every level of his thought" (1999 [1998]: 189). This view gains the most extreme of representations when Cavafy's poem is placed precisely on a moment that invents the author's thought on the beauty of Bowles and on the desire that Bowles inspires in him, a desire that mirrors the ones that, according to Woods and Lily, would make Cavafy write because Cavafy ultimately "is insistent that desire should lead to action" (Woods 1999 [1998]: 188). In Amat's text, the action to which desire leads is writing. In relation to *Viajar es muy difícil*, Cavafy is left in his particular "Casa de Atrás", both himself and Bowles "escondidos".

Amat's reading of the predominantly male literary canon is a constant search for the ambiguous, the unorthodox, the silent and undefined and it is there, in destabilisation, that she wants to read the canon, the home of the literary fathers.

“Los padres literarios”, recurrently referred to in *La intimidad*, are an entity that needs clarification. Nowhere is the presence of fictionalised male writers more determinant than in the plot of *La intimidad* although this tendency is, as was discussed in Part I, recurrent in Amat’s texts. The narrator’s rendering of the melancholy of the father can only be fully understood by appealing to her treatment of genderisation and to her view of the family structure they are both part of. The concept of homosexual panic becomes decisive in order to understand the characterisation of both father and daughter and also the epistemological distance between the unpublished text and the published novel. The presence of homosexual panic in literature, i.e. the writing of homosexual panic, is very much embedded in the silences of discourse, being furthermore by definition a silent writing that is interior.

It has to be taken into consideration that in the characterisation of his role, literary or real, the father emerges as a silent bohemian subject. Bohemia and melancholia define the central male character in *La intimidad*, and also define the male literary authors appearing in *Todos somos Kafka*, *Viajar es muy difícil* and *Letra herida*. Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her *Epistemology of the Closet* suggests the accuracy of regarding the flux of bohemia as

[...] the temporal space where the young, male bourgeois literary subject was required to navigate his way through his “homosexual panic” –seen here as a developmental stage– toward the more repressive, self-ignorant, and apparently consolidated status of the mature bourgeois paterfamilias (1990: 193).

Against this profile, the figure of the literary father appears and mirrors the characterisation of the bachelor outlined by Kosofsky. The flux of bohemia runs through Amat's texts and the only concrete temporal and social references found in *La intimidación* and *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* are related not to the narrator's life but to the father's youth before and after the Spanish Civil War, an event that moved him to accept frustration and repression as a way of living.⁴ His self-exploration stopped then. He becomes a "huérfano de la vida" (*Intimidación*, 1997: 147) in the same way that she is orphaned due to her mother's death. He is not the first self-marginalising and self-centered widower whose sexual identity has appeared problematised through fiction, as Kosofsky proves in her analysis of Thackeray's *Lovel, the widower*.

The "mature bourgeois paterfamilias" (Kosofsky 1990: 193) is never embodied by the father in Amat's texts, but by the father of the father, the grandfather of the female narrators Amat privileges as main narrative voices.⁵ As important as the father, young widower and bachelor at the same time, is the appearance of motherless female narrative voices in Amat's texts, preferential observers of the widower/bachelor and main narrators. The absence of a maternal figure inaugurates the androgynous characterisation of these voices, whose bodies are never essentialized, whose bodies are bodies in absence and therefore lack genderisation, hence the androgyny. The narrator of *La intimidación* is one of them. Having already stated that the figure of the father recurrently blends with the figure

⁴ This, of course, is part of the generational portrait undertaken in *El país del alma*.

⁵ The character of the grandfather in the short story "Casa de verano" (in Camps 1999) can be considered the cruellest depiction of the dictatorial father.

of the canonical male writer, it is appropriate to bear in mind that the agent of the union is the androgynous female voice endowed with authorial power by the use of narrative. The writing she generates is also the writing that generates her. It is not solipsistic because it blends and unites the double characterisation of the male writer and the father.

La intimidación has suppressed the relationship between the father and the son, significantly explored in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*. The two sons are really not important characters in *La intimidación*. They never speak and the narrator pays virtually no attention to them. However, in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, the brother is homosexual and the narrator, as a child, identifies him with the father. They are equals, they are alike. The unusual family structure is the sphere of representation against which characterisation occurs. In neither of these texts does the reader get a glimpse of a society, or of an epoch, but of an unusual family structure that determines the genderisation of characters and works as a fissure through which sexual identity is explored on the grounds of its instability.

In *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, Esther, the narrator, seems to be aware from a very early age that there is something going on *between men*, to borrow Kosofsky's title, something that excludes her, something that her brother has and the father sees and something that the brother will repress as he grows older. Esther directly addresses this issue when, as a young woman, she passes the following judgement on him

[...] tu verdad abandonó las alas de la imaginación, se volvió miserable y terrena, instrumentó su lenguaje (*Cuerpo*: 126).

It is not that sexuality is rendered problematic but that sexuality, as a textual construct, is much signified through silence or through absence. The abnormal family structure and the absence of a stable female figure influence the genderisation of the main narrative voice. The expression of a politics of representation is related to the existence of a politics of difference that Amat's main narrative voices (always female) subtextually communicate.

The male homosexual desire that Esther sees in her brother from early childhood and that she appears to perceive naturally makes her, through a process of identification, assign the same type of desire to the father. What Esther witnesses as she and her brother grow older is the brother's assimilation of the closet. And she sees how his own subject position is being constructed as a closeted one, because it mirrors the father's. She wonders whether the father is or is not like the son and she would like to know why. As an adult narrator, she sees how the father is worried about his own inability to make the children "do" their gender right:

Papá seguía preocupado por nosotros, [...] por mis modales impulsivos y excesivamente agrestes en contraste con tu finura, con tus gestos delicados que parecían languidecer antes de finalizar sus actos; por mi idioma ya imposible de contestar en su idioma; por tu soñadora pereza; por mi vicio del insomnio; por tus notas; por mi amor; por nuestra poca aveniencia –tú a lo tuyo y yo a lo mío– que sin querer cultivaba hablándonos por separado, mandándonos sobres secretos que a tí te hablaban de mí y a mí me confirmaban que tú eras diferente [...] (*Cuerpo*: 70).

The two children fail to perform genderisation correctly, and although that does not imply homosexuality, it does cause him panic. The boy is not masculine and the girl is not feminine and their ambiguity increases as the years go by. The world will not read them straight. He cannot read them straight and his preoccupation can be interpreted as his own homosexual panic, a panic not shared by the children. Homosexual panic has to be teased out from the obsessive silences of the father and from the recognition of the homosexuality of his own son in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, from the androgyny of the female narrators of the two texts and from the silences of the deceased wife that will never return. It is a remarkably important textual contrast that in *La intimidación* the process of closeting sexual identity which the brother was undergoing has been omitted, and the focus is placed on the male character who is definitely closeted, is not in the process of coming in, and will definitely never come out. The absence of a female and feminine character haunts both texts and inaugurates the destabilisation of gender patterns. However, in *La intimidación*, the narrator, rather than refusing to read or write the father straight, will narrate how she cannot construct the vision of a straight male. In this way, she states that the melancholy of the father is

[...] un dolor que mi padre llevaba arrastrando desde su primera hasta su segunda boda (*Intimidación*, 1997: 173).

This melancholic pain, initially linked to the early death of his wife, the narrator's mother, actually surpasses it and remains, and is tied to matrimony. The main

narrative voice of *La intimidación* is very similar to Esther, the narrator of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, although she is called Nuria and her name is only revealed at the end. The interesting feature of the female narrators is that neither Esther nor Nuria characterizes their own body as heterosexually correct and their own sexuality stops being an issue. In *La intimidación*, this first-person female voice, very close to androgyny and obsessed by the silences contained in literary texts, subliminally problematises the masculinity of the father, narrating it at the same time as she reiterates the sadness of this character and the decisive importance of the books of his library.

The perception of one's own otherness achieved through literature, through the written word, is particularly determinant in *La intimidación*. Here the dialogue with the brother is no longer present. But in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* it is very meaningful. The adult narrator puts forward the idea that she was already able to see the brother's homosexuality in childhood and that the reason she could do so was that she was ambiguous herself. As an adult, she has accepted ambiguity as a way of life. Esther becomes a "fémina adulterada por sombras algo viriles" (*Cuerpo*: 82-83) and the narrator of *La intimidación* evolves from being "una bruja encorsetada" (*Intimidación*, 1997: 16) –that is the way she remembers herself as a child– to being an adult woman without a sex. With respect to *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, *La intimidación* suppresses the relationship between the father and the son or sons. The main narrative voice absorbs the ambiguity she had shared with the brother in *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* and sees her body as follows

Mi cuerpo, creo, fue siempre una especie de huella o cicatriz dejada por la ausencia de sexo. Las sombras no tienen sexo (*Intimidad*, 1997: 267).

This absence of sex has to be interpreted as an absence of coherent sexualisation, a recognisable union between biological and generic sex. She cannot read coherency in sex. Sexual identity is always in a paradoxical or contradictory relationship with reality, with the Real. This is the same relationship she establishes between the reality she marginally offers glimpses of –Barcelona, the 50s, 60s, 70s– and the representational power of literature, to which both father and daughter resort thus displacing the social. As an aside, the displacement of the social can be positioned differently within Amat's narrative poetics and receive a broader meaning encompassing both narrative poetics and politics of representation. If the *bildungsroman* genre is used overarchingly, as a metaphor that describes synthetically Amat's narrative evolution, then the depiction of the social does not appear as textually displaced by the literary. Its presence, always in the background, except in *El país del alma*, where it is an integral part of the textual tissue, comprises the historical picture of a town (Barcelona) and different historical periods: the post-war era (*El país del alma*), the 50s and 60s (*La intimidad*) and the years of the transition to democracy (*Pan de boda* and *Narciso y Armonía*). It is the vision of a constructed historical memory rather than the concrete vision offered through the eyes of a narrator, as is the case in the classic *bildungsroman*.

The father is first and foremost a literary father, a frustrated writer and, like his daughter, a compulsive reader. But he does not want her to read the silences in the text of his life and she, a character also defined by literature, is unavoidably inclined to make sense of the father's silence and melancholy, and read them further beyond the absence of the mysterious woman the mother was. *El país del alma* can be read as the elucidation of these enigmatic points but, paradoxically, it is a text that makes the death of the mother and the androgynous discourse of main female narrators the most complicated piece of this textual puzzle, for there merge the challenge posed to gender and genre and the field of signification institutionalised between the two concepts.

In order to reach the figure of the father and the notion of male homosexual panic as part of his characterisation, it has been necessary to get to him by moving from the narrator's self-portrait through her rendering of the fact which they share in common, namely the absence of the female figure (mother and wife) in order to reach him and decode the silence of his melancholy. The absence of the mother is epistemological and ontological. Gender structures are never stabilised; they do not have a chance to become so. This explains the narrator's ability to read for something in the father that can be interpreted as homosexual panic. Homosexual panic is one of the aspects related to sexuality and gender identity that can be read in the silence by which the text communicates sex and genderisation. Other aspects that could have been explored are: the characterisation of the narrator as a female dandy, the mirage of stability offered by matrimony, and the referential presence of literature in the

text. These issues have been solved in Amat's later works and have found a place in her texts. The female dandies chosen as covers for *Todos somos Kafka* and *Monstruos* symbolise and precede the gender awareness exhibited by the author in *La intimidación*, *Letra herida* and *El país del alma*. The exploration of matrimony as legal frame for female subjects already conditioned by oppressive social moulds was undertaken in *Pan de boda* and *El país del alma*. As far as the referential presence of literature is concerned, Amat's texts have moved from the "broken" and unsettled discourse of "la lectora" in *Todos somos Kafka* to the conscious and structured voice of *Letra herida* and to the sophisticated metaliterary tissue of *La intimidación* and *El país del alma*. Homosexual panic, by definition, cannot reach the same level of textual consolidation because it has to remain hidden in order to exist, prior to the advent and narration of the homosexual subject.

The narrator not only characterises the father as sad widower and sad paternal figure but he is also, in a way, her "padre literario". The presence of the father and the absence of the mother condition the narrator's relationship with literature and with the act of reading. Throughout the whole text, the absence of the mother cannot be separated from the absence of genderisation in the self-development of the narrator and also from the rendering she makes of the father. As a *bildungsroman*, *La intimidación* offers many readings: one is metaliterary, another could focus on the psychoanalytical plot of the text, and one could deal with the relationship between gender and genre the narrator explores as she writes. Additionally, instead of reading backwards and tracing the melancholy of the father back into Amat's unpublished

novel, one could read forward and analyse the figure of the dead mother in *La intimidad* relating it to *El país del alma* (1999), an aspect already outlined in the third section of the previous chapter and whose symbolic implications will be considered next.

3. ANDROGYNOUS VOICES AND DEAD MOTHERS

No hubo modelo en mi infancia al que yo pudiera disfrazar de madre. Yo era mi madre en miniatura. Además, la melancolía de mi padre me exigía desdoblarme mil veces en mi madre. Eso estaba bien. Así yo tendría madre para siempre. Hasta el fin de mis días. Había conseguido hacer de mí su propia pérdida. Algo conseguí arreglar con esta trampa. Al convertirme yo en la ausente, o al ser la ausencia parte de mí misma, desaparecía esa fuerza que me empujaba hacia el vacío. La mitad de mi vida, aquella que todavía voy a ver al cementerio, estaba muerta (*Amor*, 1990: 62).

Me quedaba frente al espejo para ver cuánto de ella guardaba yo de mí (*Amor*, 1990: 66)

The short story “Cuánto de ella guardaba yo de mí” (61-67), from *Amor breve*, synthesises the relationship between the existence of a female narrator that tends towards androgyny and the absence of a mother. *El país del alma* narrates the story of the death of the mother. *La intimidación* is narrated by an orphan, obsessed by literary silences and ungendered. In *Narciso y Armonía* we encounter the ideal of androgyny narrated in the character of the motherless Armonía. Maite, in *Pan de boda*, wants her baby daughter to escape genderisation. In her room, Pat, dressed in a white nightgown apparently similar to the one Nena dies in, disdainfully talks about her librarian mother, a figure repeated in *La intimidación*. In this case, librarianship turns out to be the destiny the melancholic father wants for his daughter in an attempt to channel her greed for books into something that is not dangerous. Daughters and mother figures engage in an endless change of reflection that never ends because it

turns back against itself. This section aims to explore further the effects the continual absence of the mother has in the development and characterisation of androgynous narrative voices. Although preference will be given to *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, there will be references to other novels in order to clarify as much as possible the influence of the death of the mother in the metaliterary characterisation of the female narrators.

The narrator of the short story stays in front of the mirror to see how much of the other, the mother, is reflected in the image she, the daughter, projects into the glass. In *El país del alma* we have two voices, Nena's voice and the omniscient voice. *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* reflects, like the short story, the other female selves Amat has narrated. Esther's androgyny is narrated, the femininity of the mother is narrated as in *El país del alma*, the complexity of character hidden behind the narrative of a beautifully enigmatic femininity. Nena's death is a literary construct. It is not possible to ascertain from the text the real cause of her death. The medical reasons, a text in their own right, remain a silence. Her disease can be read as a disease of repression only if gender and genre are intertwined. The mythology of illness has been used to construct Nena's pathology and characterisation. It is related to her being passionate, her strongly wanting to be someone else somewhere else, in

spite of her love for Baltus and the girls.⁶ *El país del alma* can be read as a literary narrative of the death of the mother, a death the narrator of *La intimidad* tries to understand by resorting to literature and looking for what the death of the mother symbolises in books.

Symbolically speaking, the father has killed the literariness of the mother. Looking for reflexivity entails trying to grasp a coherent state of subjection. Because Nuria, the narrator of *La intimidad*, uses literature to construct her own state of *being*, realising as she does that the possibilities of self-reflection within this literary tissue are infinite, the metaliterary discourse which her subjection ultimately is reproduces a female voice whose coherence can only be comprehended in silence. Her discourse borders on apparent incoherence because its coherence only functions when it is thought within the symbolic practice of literature. When her subjectivity is spoken or written, it demands decodification, it is incoherent because her metaliterary language originates in the usually considered incoherent silence of madness –“el término hueco y silenciado de la locura” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 90)–, a term

⁶ On a trip through Europe, their first trip abroad, Nena and Baltus encounter the writer Mercè Rodoreda in a café in Geneva. Nena talks to her and, after that, the omniscient voice affirms that Nena “pensó en ser modista y escritora, provocadora y chocante” (*País*, 1999: 167). These frustrated wishes mirror the life of the writer Rodoreda in exile, and exile for Amat is a “Casa de Atrás” and precedes literary creation. Nena herself reflects on the encounter as follows:

Como ya no puede escribir, dijo Nena, la modista hace pespuntos de palabras. Muchas modistas son escritoras moribundas. Deshacen por la noche las costuras cosidas durante el día. Así también trabaja la escritura. Porque para escribir bien hay que empezar siendo muy humilde, una pobre costurera de palabras.

Y tú cómo lo sabes, dijo Lola.

Ah, dijo Nena con mirada interrogante (*País*, 1999: 166).

As has already been mentioned, one of Baltus and Nena’s daughters is called Aloma, the same name as the title of a novel by Rodoreda. This novel was written in Catalan in 1936, then revised and published in Catalan 1969. It was translated into Spanish in 1974.

that being “silenciado” and not “silencioso” has an emptiness susceptible of being filled with meaning. From this perspective, truth or, rather, the production of her truth for herself, can only be achieved in madness or where madness goes: “la verdad estaba en el manicomio, en lo que nunca podía ver del todo” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 269). The mother is what she can never totally see because she cannot see her in reality. She can construct her in the mind but she cannot give her agency. Her mother will never be able to talk, a fact that turns the narrator’s discourse into a “biografía de muertos” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 165) written in “el idioma de la no madre” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 97).

In *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, as in *La intimidad*, the representation of the mother is also melancholic because she cannot use literature to fill all the silences of the mother’s representation and it is precisely in literature where she finds she has been silenced. These are the silences she tries to write. Literarizing the absence of the mother and finding substitutes in literature provides the novel with a structure of signification that makes up for the lack of plot in the sense of pattern of events in which causality is not only explicit or implied but also real and not only a product of fiction, as is the case with *La intimidad*. However, the novel, as text, asserts a process of identity construction that fails in the real but arguably not in the symbolic. Still, as Butler suggests,

if identity is asserted through a process of signification [e.g. a text], if identity is always already signified, and yet continues to signify as it circulates within various interlocking discourses, then the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an ‘I’ that preexists signification. In other words, the enabling conditions for an assertion of ‘I’ are provided by the structure of signification (1990: 143).

Metaliterature, or literature as journey, is a structure of signification that also preexists the construction of new subversive signification moulds. It is made of discourses that perpetually interlock themselves. This is what the narrator of *La intimidación* has learned from literature. As a consequence, she can privilege literary activities, reading and writing, carried out against what she has previously read and previously written, as the definite sources of self-representation. In this way, from a psychoanalytical perspective, it could be claimed that the agency of the narrator of *La intimidación* is literary because literature is what compensates the deficiency of reality where she will not look for representation anymore, since the mother is not there. The meaning of reality is clearly insufficient. Of course, presenting the mother as an absence whilst the narrator tries to find a language and create discursive agency conditions greatly the existence of a psychoanalytical plot and a psychoanalytical level of interpretation. However, it is more a question of narrating the influence of reading in the formation of the psyche: the mapping of the psyche by reading. Ortega describes *La intimidación* as a “viaje en torno al mapa de una biografía reescrita para ser revivida, exceder la desolación y recobrar el sentido” (1998: 16).

Except in *Pan de boda*, the mother is always dead and *El país del alma* narrates the death of the mother, a fact that conditions the literary-subjectivity and subjectivisation of the narrators of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, *Todos somos Kafka* and *La intimidación*, and the main female character of *Narciso y Armonía*. The death of the mother deeply conditions plots and characterisation. The maternal figure has to be

related to the formation of the *psyche* of the female subject and to themes related to motherhood itself: pregnancy, abortion, sexuality and the configuration of gender identity. In Amat's fiction, problematic genderisation is a key feature of problematic characterisation. In the published novels, it found expression through the formulation of problematic subjects, subjects in conflict, and in *El país del alma*, a subject whose conflict is expressed by being romantically ill, and, as Sontag remarks:

[...] unromantic depression has supplanted the romantic notion of melancholy. [...] Depression is melancholy minus its charms –the animation, the fits (1991 [1977]: 51).

It is interesting to observe how the most romantic of all female subjects narrated by Amat is Nena Rocamora. Her melancholy is distinctively gendered. It is related to her gesture and to her body that, for Butler, would have become melancholic because of its inability to escape gender.⁷ If genderisation is observed in relation to subjectivisation, the presence of the body with its social relevance cannot be overlooked. In this way, the subject appears as clearly Kantian, “forced, then, to accept the ineluctability of the body as a presupposition” (Butler 1997: 48). As a construct, gender always passes judgement on the body and Nena's body culturally signifies melancholia through genderisation. If taken as literary, her death is ontologically the same as the death of the mother the narrator of *La intimidación* causes to signify by reading it in books in what can be considered a feminist way insofar as

⁷ Butler extensively deals with the relationship between gender and melancholia in relation to Freud in *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Butler 1990).

she avoids genderisation. Nuria, the narrator, has not known the melancholy of the mother but relates the father's melancholic mourning to the silence of the mother's deeds and death.

In *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, the absence of the mother with the consequent suppression of her subjectivity influences the representation of the female subject and causes revealing results. Esther lives with her brother and father. The brother, ambiguous boy, is at the same time a mirror image of the father. As the years go by, the boy resembles the father more and more whereas Esther, although she does not have a model of the same sex to assimilate herself with, is being increasingly paired, as she gets older, with the figure of the dead mother. Initially, the mother is not simply an absence for Esther. She is also a secret. During childhood, the imagination of the narrator will ceaselessly make an effort to construct the maternal image: an image that overcomes the feminine representations others offer. Furthermore, Esther's mind tries to bridge the gap between the image of her mother as "buena, cariñosa, una santa" (*Cuerpo*: 15) given by others and the father's more specific equation between the fascinating but difficult character of the departed mother and Esther's, expressed in his categorical final equation between the two of them: "[...] no puedo llegar a ti, eres casi como mamá [...]" (*Cuerpo*: 52). "Casi" but not quite like her because Esther is described as "una niña fea y antipática" (*Cuerpo*: 15) that androgynously develops into "una figura de fémina adulterada por sombras algo viriles" (*Cuerpo*: 83). The lack of total sameness develops into a consistent strand Esther needs to keep her narrative going and to look for identification elsewhere. The

'elsewhere' is, as has been discussed, the relationship between the grandfather, the father and the son.

The expression of a politics of representation is related to the existence of a politics of difference which Amat's main narrative voices subtextually communicate. The appearance of androgynous voices who have literary representational potential contrasts with the death of the ones that, as mothers, shared the symbolic space of the daughters but never gained literary agency.⁸ The relationship between feminist politics and the concept of difference has touched on issues related to essentialism and identity. As far as Amat's treatment of androgyny is concerned, it has to be concluded that when her narrators characterise themselves precisely through a voluntary literary essentialisation, it is actually the other one, the essentialisation anchored in the body, the one that is being removed from significations and therefore from politics of representation. It has a place in the text –the place of death– and an absent discourse –the silence of the dead mother–. Textual silence and the expression of difference go together. In the case of this novel, what differentiates and is not spoken marks what is or is not (ambiguously) inscribed upon the body of the brother, of the father, of the imagined mother and of Esther herself. Esther has already learnt

⁸ In *La intimidad*, the narrator relates her literary relationship with the mother from the perspective of the window. They share the same textual space, as the quotation from *Amor breve* at the beginning of the present section shows, but they cannot be in the same symbolic space for agency. In this way and in relation to the window that is opened to narrative:

La hija era alzada mientras la madre se estrellaba contra el suelo (*Intimidad*, 1997: 71).

And at the same time:

La madre era alzada mientras yo me estrellaba contra el suelo (*Intimidad*, 1997: 73).

to read the meaning of silence and secrecy and from a very early age seems to be an observer of her brother's state of estrangement. As a young woman, she passes judgement on the voice of the brother: "Tu voz no casa con tu figura. Te avergüenzas y la escondes" (*Cuerpo*: 114). As far as her own voice and her own representation are concerned, she tells the ambiguous body she sees in her brother that she does not long for unity, as her keenness on contemplating herself distorted proves:

[...] mi afición a contemplarme en el salón de las lunas, achatada, aplastada, alargada, anudada, aplanada, adelgazada, alelada, agrandada, agigantada y siempre adoradamente deforme (*Cuerpo*: 81).

If this being "adoradamente deforme" is read subtextually, taking into account the presence of androgynous narrators in the books that at the time of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* had not been written yet and to how the presence and absence of the feminine, present in the mother but absent in the daughter, would interrelate particularly in *La intimidad*, the influence of genderisation is revealed. The implications of this fact at the textual time of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* are enormous. Esther is obsessed with finding the meaning of what she sees as "deforme" in the sense of abnormal in her family. In this way, from a very early age she becomes aware that, again, there is something going on *between men* and she wants to know what it is. Whatever it might be remains as unarticulated for the boy as it remains for her. Problematic masculinity and problematic femininity permeate Amat's texts. However, at this stage, Esther simply problematises while the third person voice amplifies the representational possibilities of the influence of genderisation. The

mirror that should have reflected the image of the mother reflects now Esther's image as an adolescent, a parody of a lady, bordering on the grotesque:

Y cuando Esther se crecía en altos, desteñidos zancos de opalina [her mother's high heel shoes] y se subía a la cómoda concentrada en su estudiado y aún no aprendido equilibrio, el espejo del armario rompía su purgatorio cristalizando en sus formas una avestruz en cucullas (*Cuerpo*: 57).

The mirror is in the door of the mother's closet. The door of the closet symbolically containing and hiding the femininity of the mother (dresses, shoes, jewellery, all items turned into her essence, what is left of her body) turns Esther into a parody of that original and lost image, an image that can be imagined to be similar to Nena. "Una avestruz", that, estranged in front of the mother's closet, will analogically assume that the father's closet, "el transfondo del armario del padre" (*Cuerpo*: 6), and his own reflection on the door, might confine something as problematic as her own image in respect of her relationship with the contents of the mother's closet. According to Judith Butler, the grammar of the woman subject and of the queer subject—for her, the two most problematic entities from a literary perspective—would turn subjectivisation into a constant process of misrecognition. The problematic masculinity of the brother is related to a process of misrecognition that has to do with genderisation. Esther is able to perceive that there is something her brother works hard at inscribing upon himself:

[...] pertenecías a su bando [the father and grandfather's], intentabas imitar su modo de hablarme, de mandarme, de contradecirme, en todo menos en quererme, porque tú y yo nunca nos hemos querido, según decían ellos [...]. Año tras año

enfrentándonos como perro y gato encerrados en común, creyéndote que eras igual a ellos, como si eso fuese un no sé qué digno de admiración (*Cuerpo*: 14).

At this juncture, it is essential to look at the ambiguity of both Esther and the brother. The third-person voice sees the ambiguity in Esther and Esther sees the ambiguity in the brother. What type of ambiguity is this? In which ways is characterisation problematic? What do they hold in secrecy? An initial reflection upon the milieu in which the characters' lives occur brings the structure of the family to the fore. The most important silence demanding decodification in the book is not the influence of the death of the mother but the effects her continual absence has on the development of the characters. The mother is not a signifier without a signified. She is symbolic, she is not real, and she is a mental image corresponding to an icon that lives in photographs above mantelpieces and next to vases with flowers. She might not possess real subjectivity, i.e. she has no possibility of *becoming* but she certainly *is* something. From this perspective, the text shows the failure of the power of archetypal definition.

The absence of the mother is not merely an absence. Her death somehow privileges more the already privileged patriarchal status of the family unit while at the same time not only silences her subjectivity but also forecloses it forever. In what way? By showing that although dead, the mother is still institutionalised. And the text somehow claims it could not have been otherwise. This has important implications if a reading of gender is done not only in this novel but also in all of Amat's production. Esther is imagining the mother on the assumption that her

discourse has always been silenced and therefore for narrative purposes, has never existed. The critical dimension of this line of thought emerges as enormous. The silenced discourse of the (m)other has resulted in the production of a feminist discourse not only in psychoanalysis but also in narratology (*écriture féminine*) and subject-object relations criticism. In the case of Amat, it triggers the chain of associations with notions of gender criticism and also queer theory because the absence of the mother will make the politics of representation of all bodies seen through Esther's eyes unstable. And, paradoxically, she then stabilises the mother:

Fue entonces cuando empecé a conocerla, a verla detrás de las puertas, sentada en mi cama, mirándome fijamente o dejando para mí señales de su presencia en la casa. Fue entonces cuando creí que a mamá no se la habían inventado [...] (*Cuerpo*: 16).

Esther finds the mother and her finding will influence her dialogue with the brother, who is often the singular addressee of Esther's talk. There are times in which the addressee materialises itself as plural. When this happens, it is possible, i.e. more obvious, less representatively ambiguous, to talk about the masculine other being the entity that corresponds to the fictive 'you' in the text. But the brother cannot construct the same image. His image of the mother corresponds to the pattern of "la Santa Sumisión" (16) and, therefore, as Esther acknowledges,

te convertiste en el tercer ferviente embaucador del secreto de mamá, desgraciadamente muerta para vosotros y felizmente viva para mí, que poco a poco fui haciendo de su foto lo mismo que ocurre con las películas animadas donde las imágenes quietas parecen cobrar vida por un casual, simple y progresivo movimiento (*Cuerpo*: 16).

The mother *is* a secret silence for everyone, but not so for Esther. Esther makes the absent mother *become* a secret, Esther's own version of the mother's absence. The reader has then access to the secret life the first-person narrator gives to her mother in her mind. Esther starts depicting her mother's self thus deepening her own self-awareness, a process studied in detail when analysing *La intimidad* (1997).

The games with gender should not surprise from this perspective. Furthermore, the lack of uniform gender citationality produced by the abnormal family structure has, to begin with, important Foucauldian implications. Having already stated that in the configuration of her identity, processes of identification are only influential due to their absence, she is able to see the absence of identification in others and consequently the force of misrecognition. And misrecognition is something she takes for granted, misrecognition in the process of subject construction.

Still there is something else as well as gender awareness conditioning this perspective. All of Amat's characters are in some way or other a body in conflict. There is always some kind of discrepancy between sex, gender and body. Amat's texts never exhibit a harmonic relationship between body and what is culturally inscribed on it.⁹ In the case of Esther, she lacks the mediatory presence of the mother. The psychoanalytic importance of identification processes with the mother or maternal figures is therefore going to be questioned. And, in the same way, the

⁹ See, for example, Maite's estrangement on pregnancy and her disdainful comments on its social formulations (*Pan*, 1979: 91), the construction of Armonía's reformulation of the harmony between sexes and genders (*Narciso*, 1982: 234-238) and the short stories "Las supervivientes" (1990: 17-21), "Hipatia" (1990: 22-33) and "Testimonio de una mujer blanca" (1990: 41-46) in *Amor breve*.

relationship with the father will be problematised too. In later works, the relationship between father and daughter will have new nuances: the father will be a literary father, the daughter will be a novelist or a reader and the bond between male writers and the women on their lives will also be explored.

Amat is an author whose narrative poetics precisely engage with the expression of ambiguity, ambivalence and what is evasive or has been marginalised from the point of view of space, discourse, time, in a nutshell, referentiality. She is therefore always navigating through heterogeneity thus exposing problematic cultural sites whose decodification causes the narrative discourse to suggest itself, (re)creating politics of representation anew. This is the relationship that can be established between *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* and the rest of Amat's production.

Cuerpo desnudo blanco explains a lot. With this statement, the analysis of the unpublished text steps right into the deconstructive arena, a move that was not intended in my analysis, as I aimed to mix into a palatable blend feminist/ gender criticism and psychoanalysis. Still, deconstructive criticism called into question categories as 'feminine' and 'masculine' and also preceded the production of French psychoanalytic criticism. The displacement of meaning is a Derridean contribution to literary analysis and one used by feminists to reinterpret psychoanalysis. However, a proper deconstructive view can only be adopted at the end of the research, if at all. *A priori*, it is not feasible and would be simplistic to develop an analysis on the assumption that the unpublished text can be the centre of all other works and all other works stem from it. On the other hand, the presence of a psychoanalytical plot in

Cuerpo desnudo blanco and the inauguration of what will become compulsively repeated features justify the minor deconstructive contribution to the feminist and psychoanalytical analysis.

Dealing with the self-referential line *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* exhibits entails appreciating how referentiality is affected by the alternate usage of first- and third-person narrative voices. Esther's own voice, the voice of her self, is of course entirely subjective. It refers to herself and is an interpretation of her immediate world. The omniscient narrator by definition narrates a subject in process, interprets the continuous (re)formation of a self. The only feature the two voices share is precisely gender awareness and density of representation that causes the text to be a referential tool that projects itself on to the reading of late works.

Although *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* can be seen as a subtext and therefore projected into Amat's subsequent publications, the novel is an ontological critical tool in its own right. Had the author not been willing to offer it to me, the text would remain a secret. And secrets can, in the context of Amat's works, be taken into analytical consideration as the unspoken conditions of the politics of representation preserved throughout this novel in particular, although silence and secrecy are representational sustaining blocks of all novels by Amat.

Esther's white naked body is the body of the end of the novel. Abortion and an unromanticised view of pregnancy permeate Amat's texts. Abortion is the end of this unpublished novel. The main theme of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* is the confrontation with the other: the father, the brother and Marcos, Esther's partner.

Writing and otherness are also related, as Esther finds out when she starts to write. This is an anxious text, greedy for signification but too excessive to fully signify, unframed and unpublished. The omniscient narrator offers a picture of Esther's writing activities

Esther empezó a sentir el dolor de la escritura. [...] escribir era una pantalla donde se veía diferente [...] y se temía a sí misma o le asustaba la deformidad de su rostro hundido en una pecera (*Cuerpo*: 50).

"Una pecera" is like one of the many "lunas" of the "salón" (81). This statement will lead to Maite, the first literary, i.e. framed within a text, character created by Amat. However, this statement could have been uttered by the omniscient voice of *El país del alma*, the voice of the dead mother in reference to her grown up literary daughter, the narrator of *La intimidación*. The relationship between the narrator of *La intimidación* and "la voz" changes and those changes can be used to indicate the passing years. Thus, the existence of a linear time is positioned in the background in the same way that Dickens's portrayal of domestic life, the rendering her father wished her to make, is. Sanity is fictitious not only in the sense of a product of fiction but also in the sense of lie or mirage. Nuria does not believe in the possibility of literary sanity, hence her mocking of the methods of "la doctora Cohen" (*Intimidación*, 1997: 262), always trying to find "adequate explanatory schemes" (Butler 1997: 171) for all her female patients. The irony lies in the fact that "la doctora Cohen" (who can be regarded as a representation of academic feminism) sends the narrator home. The theme of women writers and writing by women gains relevance while the narrator is

in the psychiatric hospital and this academic feminist subject is presented. Dr. Cohen or “la doctora-libro” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 261) wants to write on women writers and insanity in order to prove that “para ser escritora era necesario navegar en la locura” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 262). Foucault’s views on the relationship between medical practices and the ritual of confession that subsequently helped to build up medical codes of practice and secrecy and their relationship with knowledge and power, are used to describe Cohen’s psychoanalytical methodology and the gathering of what she considers relevant information, data whose biased nature the narrator is very careful to convey in her rendering of her stay in the clinic. The narrator cannot find her agency in the difference culturally communicated by her body, the relationship Cohen and certain branches of academic feminism have postulated. Her agency is sustained in her reading and interpretation of what already exists in books. The reification of the female body for the purposes of feminist research is also feared by Butler:

My only concern is that sexual difference not become a reification which unwittingly preserves a binary restriction on gender identity and an implicitly heterosexual framework for the description of gender, gender identity and sexuality. There is, in my view, nothing about femaleness that is waiting to be expressed; there is, on the other hand, a good deal about the diverse experiences of women that is being expressed and still needs to be expressed, but caution is needed with respect to that theoretical language, for it does not simply report a pre-linguistic experience [Julia Kristeva’s formulations], but constructs that experience as well as the limits of its analysis (Butler, in Conboy, et. al. 1997: 414-415).

In *Letra herida*, Amat writes that “El mundo propuesto por las mejores novelistas de estos años ha sido subestimado en ocasiones por la crítica, que al no

comprender esta nueva revisión de la voz y la palabra, ha preferido reducir este fenómeno a la definición de escritura femenina (el solo adjetivo me da náuseas)” (*Letra*, 1998: 218). The gender awareness shown by the author could justify the fact that sexual difference is never reified by the narrator of *La intimidad*. In this way, she cynically replies to the erotic “escritora número tres”: “soy etérea [...]. No existo, así que te sentirás mejor si dejas de mirarme” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 262) after this writer has compared the narrator to a nun. On the other hand, the relationship between gender and literary production is dramatised in order to implicitly delineate firstly, the figure of an impossible authentic female writer and, secondly, the eternal debt to patriarchy. This liability places the formulation of a female literary subject precisely as a possibility in the domain of the metaliterary. When the father dies and because the mother is already dead, total absence from representation seems to run next to the emergence of the textual voice:

Me sentía ausente y perturbada por la muerte reciente de mi padre. Me sabía la hija de nadie, una sombra, una voz inexistente (*Intimidad*, 1997: 252).

Butler states that “conscience is the means by which a subject becomes an object for itself, reflecting on itself, establishing itself as reflective and reflexive. The ‘I’ is not simply one who thinks about him- or herself; it is defined by this capacity for reflective self-relation or reflexivity” (1997: 22). In the only epiphanic moment of *La intimidad*, the narrator recognises herself as a “loca camuflada” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 191) and it is through her writing that she has managed to establish herself as

reflective and reflexive. Reflexive because her text is a reflection about her (in)coherent subjectivity and reflective because she reflects the sphere of literariness in order to narrate the (in)coherence of her being and becoming. In this way, metaliterature has become the extreme act of self-reflection. When the narrator asseverates “ya estoy curada” (*Intimidad*, 1997: 274), it is obvious she is deceiving herself. She allows the significance of her misperception of linear time to gain full ground but, at the same time, the obsession with the mother, a memory always under construction, has momentarily disappeared and the voice, always talking, has become silent. She is momentarily outside Metaliterature and therefore her texts are now readable. Nuria is deceived into a world of her own invention: sanity, more fictitious than anything else. It denotes that the end of the linear text is near along with the consolidation of the circularity of the time and space of her narration. The novel thus emerges as an endless genre.

CONCLUSION: METALITERATURE

AS THE EXTREME ACT OF SELF-REFLECTION

En el fondo yo deseaba escribir una novela cadáver. Imaginaba una novela en que los personajes no vivieran en función los unos de los otros, ni siquiera de sí mismos. [...] Deseaba ser la última novelista. Ver como la literatura iba muriendo lentamente ante mis propios ojos. Enterrar la literatura en la tumba de mi madre.

El proyecto era arduo y desalentador. E inmensamente contradictorio.

[...] Escribía para matar la literatura. Reirme brutalmente de ella y su artificio. Luego, matarla lentamente, envenenada.

[...] Pero la coherencia que yo buscaba era una cosa distinta de la sencilla solidaridad de las palabras domesticadas. Azuzando unas palabras contra otras intentaba encontrar la plena liberación de las fuerzas que ocultan las palabras (*Intimidad*, 1997: 94-95).

Tengo una madre que habla con las bombillas, el cielo y los tejados, pensó Esther.

Una madre que cuando muere empieza a vivir de nuevo. [...]

La niña sabía que su madre era distinta a las otras madres.

[...] Tenía el alma en la mirada. Venía de un país extraño. Del país del alma (*País*, 1999: 266).

The literary memory of the narrators of *La intimidad* and *El país del alma* inaugurates a very specific account of literary-subjectivisation always based on the fictionalisation of literature and on all the components of the literary act regarded as communication process: author, narrator, text and context, implicit and explicit reader. In both novels, writing is a continual re-testing of an (im)possible notion of a female literary-subject, a subject with only a momentary possibility of existing. This literary-subject floats between the two texts, as can be ascertained if the two excerpts above are juxtaposed. The narrator of *La intimidad* writes in order to kill literature.

Killing literature implies burying it in the mother's tomb. The mother, as can be presumed when taking also into consideration her multiform presence in *Todos somos Kafka*, *Letra herida*, Amat's early novels and *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, has endless possibilities of textual representation. In this way, Esther, Nena Rocamora's first child, looks at her mother and views her in a way that, if one reads chronologically backwards into Amat's production, appears as prophetic. Nena Rocamora's "desmayos" are symbolically interpreted by the child as momentary deaths. For Esther, her mother is therefore a mother who dies and starts to live again after having been in a strange country, the country of the soul, a space that mirrors the textual space created in Amat's previous "libros sin voz", a space utterly divorced from the representation of what is normally regarded as the real world. Esther is also the name of Amat's first created narrator, the voice of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*, who unsuccessfully tries to name the mother and turn her into a character. Failing to do so, she leaves the mother as "la innombrable" (*Cuerpo*: 67-75) and her feelings towards her as ambiguous (*Cuerpo*: 74).

Both novels originate in memory and the role played by memory is directly related to the hypothetical autobiographical dimension of literary texts. The role played by literary fiction and also literary theory and philosophy within Amat's writings radiates into so many dimensions that it blends with both the genesis of the texts and the genesis of the characters. As a consequence, literature and its political implications for the female subject come forth as primarily psychic and, additionally, serve a double purpose by involving both the subject and the author, or rather, the

authorial voice, wherever it may abide. The relationship between metaliterature and the desire for reflexivity can only be understood from a psychoanalytical perspective. As a matter of maintaining its dilemmas and paradoxes, the identity of the living author whose name appears on the cover of the book and the identity of most of her created narrators are both defined by the exercise of literature. *La intimidación* and *El país del alma* do not narrate only the representation of a life in writing but also a representation of writing in the lives of two female narrators.

Metaliterature reveals itself as self-contained and infinite, like Borges's *aleph*. Metaliterature is therefore two-dimensional: on the one hand, Amat's writing is metaliterary because it elaborates on the nature of textual genesis. On the other hand, the metaliterary dimension of her creations is a circular movement, self-contained and also self-reflexive. Dealing with self-reflexivity is tantamount to leaving open a very wide field of critical possibilities around the notions of subjection, subjectivisation, subordination and abjection. All these terms have been critically used to describe the power relationship between the individual and the social, key theme of the novel of apprenticeship or *bildungsroman*. The novel of apprenticeship ultimately portrays a picture of a concrete society through the eyes of a single character and, in this way, the social dimension is merged with the construction of the individual subject. Memory is in itself a crucial component of any autobiographical mould but in the case of these novels the narrators' memories can only be defined as literary because literary texts are the lenses through which the two female voices observe reality and reflect upon themselves. *El país del alma* is not a

bildungsroman or novel of apprenticeship strictly speaking but we do have the story of the literary *bildung* of a failed writer. The reading proposed for *Todos somos Kafka* made the novel appear as a metaliterary quest which in turn positioned the text generically close to the *bildungsroman* genre. Amat's first two published novels also deal with processes of awareness. The elaboration of a narrative voice that is at the same time authorial can be traced back in previous books by Amat and, from this perspective, *La intimidación* and *El país del alma* offer an exceedingly sophisticated result partially formulated in previous works.

Narrating the process of subject construction of a female voice who creates a discourse in a first-person voice, as is the case of *Cuerpo desnudo blanco* and *Pan de boda*, would not differentiate Amat from other novelists, such as Ana María Moix, Adelaida García Morales or Rosa Montero, who started to publish at the end of the 70s and beginning of the 80s. There are many first-person texts and many women writers who have written novels that narrate processes of awareness and whose texts have often been labelled as autobiographical. Having created characters that are totally dissociated from reality, physical and socially unable to adapt themselves, apparently more distant from the author's world –which is what Amat does in *Narciso y Armonía*– would not differentiate her from other contemporary novelists either. However, the “libros sin voz” and her recent publications establish her politics of representation and narrative poetics, firstly, as unique because of their metaliterariness and, secondly, as distinct from what critics have established as the evolutionary line of female-authored narrative after Franco. Autobiographical

narrative followed by texts peopled by characters apparently alien to the authors' identity has been a line of evolution frequently outlined by critics.¹ However, after her 1982 novel, the only narrators Amat seems interested in creating are literary-subjects. Their state of being is founded by literature, the sphere of representation that subordinates their subjectivity.² This is the case not only of narrators such as the one of *La intimidación* or "la lectora" in *Todos somos Kafka*, but also of characters such as the melancholic father of *La intimidación* or Baltus Arnau in *El país del alma*. These voices also resist genderisation and narrate themselves always evading it.

The configuration of the "I" that narrates and becomes the "eye" of the narration as narratorial or authorial voice is a key theme in Amat's writing and it could even be argued that this is an obsessive theme supported by the repeated characterisation of literary authors, and also by recreation of literary myths in *Amor breve* and *Monstruos* and by the fictionalisation of literary material in general. Amat's first two novels placed female subjects in contexts or situations where they emerge as politically vulnerable. In relation to the rest of Amat's production, this

¹ See Gascón Vera (1992), Regazzoni (1995) and Bergmann (1987), among others. The novelists often cited as examples of this evolution are Rosa Montero, Soledad Puértolas and Almudena Grandes. It is relevant to point out that the studies of critics sticking to this classification date from the end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s. If attention is paid to more recent attempts to classify narrative, we find a shift of attention towards younger authors. See Villena & Castilla, "Los autores del tercer milenio toman el relevo" (*El País*, 26/1/1998) and Barriuso, "El Baby Boom del 98" (*El País*, 30/5/1998). When the younger novelists are cast aside and a classification of mature voices is attempted, Amat continues to be left out. See for example García-Posada, "La Excelente Salud de la Narrativa" (*El País*, 30/5/1998).

² In relation to her "libros sin voz", Amat writes in *Letra herida*:

Bendito el arte de no escribir novelas o arte de escribir antinovelas o arte de escribir no novelas. Libros huérfanos. Autosuficientes. Nada persiguen estos libros fuera de ser pequeños quijotes de la aventura novelesca. Pero estos libros no militan. Simplemente, se expanden (*Letra*, 1998: 211).

political vulnerability is related to the yet underdeveloped metaliterary dimension of these novels. If Maite finished her narrative acknowledging her desire to write, Armonía, who does not have that desire as part of her characterisation, is herself characterised by an omniscient voice who openly uses myth and classical literary allusions to construct the character. The input of literature itself in the textual tissue of Amat's prose can be considered as something the author herself had to resolve or felt there was a need to explore. This explains the presence of the texts analysed in Part I and the difference in narrative poetics between the early novels on the one hand and, on the other, *La intimidad* and *El país del alma*. Amat signals *La intimidad* as the text where she found her authentic voice. In interview (Barcelona, 18/6/1999) she remarked that "con *La intimidad*, maté a mis padres literarios. Encontré mi propia voz en *La intimidad*". If an autobiographical dimension were to be found in Amat's prose, it would be reached by reflecting on the literary awareness contained in it. Along these lines, in an interview with Rubén Wisotzki, when asked to elaborate further on "la voz", she admits that

los escritores no nacemos con ella: antes de encontrar el lápiz debemos encontrar la voz. Una vez que la hallamos, debemos convencerla para que se venga con nosotros, atraerla, mantenerla con vida, dársela al lector en la esperanza de que más tarde regrese a nuestros brazos. [...] Para mí, escribir con ambición literaria es situarse en un punto límite entre la razón y la sinrazón. Ahora lo que nace es la angustia del no saber si mañana seguiremos escribiendo (*El Universal*, 29/11/1998).

The narrator of *La intimidad* writes "para matar la literatura". This act of killing literature ultimately entails assimilating it to the ghost of the mother and founding the

female-literary subject on that. A feminist agenda can be abstracted from this move of assimilation again establishing a point of contact with gender critic Butler who establishes that the feminist subject is “a phantasmatic construction” (Butler 1990: 142). It accepts confusion, understood as the impossibility to settle signification, as a state of being. In the case of Amat, this confusion or signification constantly on the move is explored using literature as a conceptual tool to be exhausted, consumed, in order to elaborate a self-reflexive discourse thus producing a narrative that occasionally comes close to an insanity that can only end in death. Death itself is also as unclear as life because both life and death are literary presences in Amat. The discourse of “la lectora” and Maite’s discourse only happen in the mind. Their agency, located in an abstract mental space, turns their subjectivisation into something “phantasmatic”. In the case of Maite, this is because she craves for literary agency, for something “la lectora” has and struggles to maintain. This anonymous voice has nothing generic, not even her text. To explain Amat’s narrators, the need to appeal to something tenuous prevails. This need does not stop in the texts. It can be maintained that it extrapolates itself to the author, given her marginal position within the Spanish literary panorama of the end of the millennium (understanding author as the point where all voices disappear). Giving space within critical discourse to the figure of the author is a critical taboo. For Barthes, giving an author to a text implies limiting it. Foucault isolates authorial power in a very simple, and arguably also simplistic, way placing it in the division and distance between real writer and main narrative voice. Amat, in order to create literature, resorts to the need to establish an

infinite dialogue with the dead authors that inhabit the cemetery the library ultimately is. In her own words, the library

[...] es la casa viva de la familia literaria. Es natural que sea en este reducto donde el escritor decida vivir con su familia adoptiva, una variante de exilio interior y voluntario. Allí es donde se encuentra con sus parientes cómodamente instalados en las estanterías. Viaja. Recupera memoria. Es feliz (*Letra*, 1998: 90).

The relationship of the narrators/ writers created by Amat with the literary fathers conditions the advent of their own literary-subjectivity. The configuration of the 'I' as narrative topic evolves from the political vulnerability of two subjects narrated against the social in *Pan de boda* and *Narciso y Armonía* towards the introspection of Nuria in *La intimidad* and Nena Rocamora in *El país del alma*. It can be claimed that the evolution of the treatment of female subjectivity develops into the compulsive treatment of a very specific type of subject, female and literary that certainly mirrors the figure of the real author.³ As a consequence, the "I" of Amat's last three publications can be interpreted as a point that fluctuates. The first-person narrator of *La intimidad*, along with the authorial voice of *Letra herida* and the formally polyphonic voice of *El país del alma* are marked by the conscious observation and incorporation of a literary world, similar to the one read in *Viajar es muy difícil* and *Todos somos Kafka* but with elements pertaining to what is regarded as the social, which are always subordinated to the inclusion of literary elements in the texts. Though literarised, the presence given to the social in Amat's recent novels contrasts,

³ See "Me sentía una terrorista del lenguaje" in *Verbigracia*, 13, III, 17/7/1999.

on the one hand, with its total absence in the “libros sin voz” and, on the other hand, with its relevance in her early novels.

The amalgamation of the different types of discourses and genres exhibited in Amat’s works would, according to Foucault, take the reader to the author, dead as he or she may be for the critic that discusses the author. The French historian summarises as follows the overview of the *oeuvre* the critic can gain when observing it from that locus of meaning he considers the author to be:

Je crois d’autre part qu’on pourrait trouver là [in the function of the author] une introduction à l’analyse historique des discours. Peut-être est-il temps d’étudier les discours non plus seulement dans leur valeur expressive ou leurs transformations formelles, mais dans les modalités de leur existence: les modes de circulation, de valorisation, d’attribution, d’appropriation des discours varient avec chaque culture et se modifient à l’intérieur de chacune; la manière dont ils s’articulent sur des rapports sociaux se déchiffre de façon, me semble-t-il, plus directe dans le jeu de la fonction-auteur et dans ses modifications que dans les thèmes ou les concepts qu’ils mettent en oeuvre (Foucault 1968: 810)

The function of the author as defined by Foucault provides a point where the different modalities of Amat’s discourse converge. Recapitulated, these different modalities consist of the literary quest undergone by “la lectora” and her chaotic discourse, the representation of a literary world to be travelled through in *Viajar es muy difícil*, *Letra herida* and “letraherida”, the life of the narrator of *La intimidación*, between “biblioteca” and “manicomio”, the literary death of Nena Rocamora in *El país del alma*, Maite’s poetic monologue, Narciso and Armonía’s ambiguity and the unfinished and unpublished *Cuerpo desnudo blanco*. How can they all be made to converge in the figure of the author? It could be claimed that this move is rhetorically

problematic insofar as what is called “author” is not a textual element although it would be generally agreed that the author could have a relevant input in the contextualisation of a text. However, at the same time, the author is a critical taboo. Separating the author from the works implied the liberalisation of literature for postmodernists.

Dealing with self-reflexivity is tantamount to leaving open a very wide field of critical possibilities around the notions of subjection, subjectivisation, subordination and abjection. The novel of apprenticeship ultimately portrays a picture of a concrete society through the eyes of a single character and, in this way, the social dimension is merged with the construction of the individual subject. *La intimidad* can be considered a *bildungsroman* that reformulates the relationship between the individual and the social through literary memory. Memory is in itself a crucial component of any autobiographical mould but in the case of this novel the narrator’s memory can only be defined as literary because literary texts are the lenses through which she observes reality and reflects upon herself. The development of a metaliterary subject is not new in Amat. In fact, the elaboration of a narrative voice that is at the same time authorial can be traced back to earlier works by Amat. *Todos somos Kafka*, *El ladrón de libros y otras bibliomanías* and the short stories from *Amor breve* “Del porqué E.R. dejó para siempre de escribir un día” (1990: 9-16), “La escritora ingrata y el lector feroz” (1990: 38-40), “Clarisa, filósofa” (1990: 47-51), “La musa” (1990: 77-86) and “Aristófanes o la máquina de descubrir falsos poetas” (1990: 117-122), narrate different instances of authorial literary-subjectivity. From

this perspective, it could be argued that Amat has given the clues to interpret her work, but only if her work is regarded from a holistic angle. In order to do so and taking into consideration the reading I have postulated throughout Part I and Part II, it is worthwhile to cast a last glance at the author from a perspective that could be called transgeneric or generically subversive, tracing, as she has tried to do for and with her narrators throughout her production, the literary *bildung* of her own voice.

The term *bildungsroman* is rhetorically problematic.⁴ Its meaning is not uniform and can be considered to have numerous gaps. This coincides with the representational ambiguity critics of the genre mention. The *bildungsroman*, as the psychoanalytical discipline, aims to expose human processes of identity construction and also to explore, in a more or less explicit way, the role of the unconscious. It could be argued that the use I intend to make of the term to round off my analysis of Amat, as an overarching metaphor that encompasses Part I and Part II thus assembling the books holistically, is the most inappropriate use to which the term could be ascribed. My transgression of the concept moves away from the critical disagreement regarding the plot of the formation or self-discovery novel. In spite of the fact that my usage of the term is extrageneric –my intention is to apply it to synthesise the process of literary awareness of a contemporary writer who presents a

⁴ The historical and etymological analyses of the term *bildungsroman* are lost in dark zones of literary history. The incorrect usage of the term done by critics intermingles with those obscure origins. The only clarity is found in connection with the names of academics that, in minor literary journals, started to talk about it in the nineteenth century. The word appeared in print for the first time in 1819 in the University of Dorpat by Karl Morgensten (1770-1852), a Professor of Rhetoric. He used it to describe the novels of the poet Friedrich Maximilian Klinger, rector of the university and close friend of Morgensten. However, Morgensten had already been using the term in his lectures around 1810. It is documented that by 1803 he had a clear vision of the generic particularities of this type of narrative and had subsequently isolated the sequences of the plot that would typify it. For further information on the history of the formation novel, see Martini (in Hardin 1991).

tendency to play with gender and genre and with first- and third-person narrative moulds—, transgressing the term implies taking it back into its origins. The *bildung* originally narrated the life of the literary author. Logically, the most relevant part of the narrative was the justification of the genesis of the authorial voice and the story of its presence in the chronological life of the writer. On the other hand, historically, one of the reasons that turned the author into an important component of the literary act was the capacity for transgression certain texts could have. Moreover, the idea of an authorial voice that travels along an infinite discursivity is not new. Nevertheless, it has been abandoned by feminist sectors that have occasionally manifested a certain phobia towards the stabilisation of the notion of author when put in relation to authority, perhaps fearing that this stabilisation would develop into a new monumentalisation of the canon thus depriving texts from their subversive capacity (e.g. Bergmann 1987, Cixous 1986). Seen as formation novel, the *bildungsroman* is closely related to human experience, its main theme. On the other hand, the importance of not losing touch with the psychoanalytical category called “self” is paramount for considering the psychoanalytical novel and the *bildungsroman* as closely related genres. Particularly if the female-authored *bildungsroman* is narrated and gender gains importance, the existence of a psychoanalytical plot gains importance too. This importance uncovers the relationship between gender and genre, both concepts that support politics of representation. The absence of a consensus for the definition of the *bildungsroman* has made it especially appealing to feminist narratologists. Other critics, such as Dilthey (1976 [1906]), researched it and

ended up announcing its death, arguing that the genre owed its emergence to the social conditions of nineteenth-century Germany and when those conditions changed, the genre disappeared. For other critics, such as feminists Ecker (1985) and Labovitz (1986) or Hispanists such as Ciplijauskaitė (1988),⁵ the formation novel is not only still alive, but also constitutes a key reappropriation site for feminism, especially if the analysis of genderisation in the female *bildungsroman* is brought to the scene.

Amat writes that “[Los libros] son, en cierta medida, como los recuerdos más queridos de una biografía personal que jamás se olvidan del todo” (*Ladrón*, 1988: 24). As the years go by, the outline of her literary biography will gain more textual presence as its literarisation becomes more and more sophisticated. In relation to what I have described as her process of literary *bildung*, she writes that

Es por tanto cierto que un libro –como anota Borges– se lee para la memoria pero no es menos cierto que se lee también para el olvido pues es sólo a partir del olvido, y del agobio y premura constante de tener que recurrir al recuerdo, como podemos

⁵ Ciplijauskaitė, on analyzing the evolution of female-authored first-person novels written in Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, concludes that

se podría decir que se ha encaminado del realismo social hacia la realidad psicológica; de estructuras establecidas a configuraciones más libres; del lenguaje convencional a expresión más personal y variada. Se puede observar una inclinación hacia lo informe [...] (1988: 30).

Like other critics, she isolates the importance of a psychological reality but there is no analysis of it. Her research is useful for understanding the evolution of female-authored first-person writing between 1970 and 1985 and obtaining an excellent overview of the field, as she also takes into consideration what was happening before. However, the proliferation of feminist theory and gender criticism after 1985 and especially in the 90's does not turn Ciplijauskaitė's text into an obsolete investigation. Quite the contrary, *La novela femenina contemporánea (1970-1985): Hacia una tipología de la narración en primera persona* (1994 [1988]) makes the understanding of the posterior eclectic evolution of female-authored texts all the more logical and graspable. Still, the critical implications of ideas like “realidad psicológica”, “configuraciones más libres”, “expresión más personal y variada” or just the adjective “informe” are not exploited to the full in order to pursue afterwards an analysis of the narrative genre.

desarrollar nuestra imaginación y a fin de cuentas nuestra actividad intelectual y creativa (*Ladrón*, 1988: 55-56).

Literature is “la enorme casa de los muertos” (*Letra*, 1998: 15) and “el autor que se cree vivo no es más que un fantasma de las palabras” (*Letra*, 1998: 20). These brief quotations deploy the importance of memory and death as features of the continuity of the process of literary *bildung*, or literary-subjectivity as I have mentioned in the previous chapters in relation to Amat’s narrators. The relationship between memory and literature becomes the obsession of the female protagonists of Amat’s most recent novels, the texts that chronologically frame *Letra herida: La intimidación* (1997) and *El país del alma* (1999). In the former text, it is part of discourse; in the latter, it is part of the silence of the book. These texts can be considered to have been written from the “Casa de Atrás”, one of the key literary sites posted in the itinerary of *Viajar es muy difícil*:

En la Casa de Atrás no hay espacio suficiente para guardar ordenadamente cada cosa. La escritora lo incluye todo en su diario. En el diario cabe todo. No es tiempo de separar memoria de lecturas. Una lo es todo. Un género literario nuevo y agotado. En el diario cabe el relato de la tragedia cotidiana, los sueños, las críticas de libros (no demasiados, y seguramente mal elegidos), opiniones, amoríos, conversaciones y diálogos familiares, listas de ropa y alimentos e incluso una maravillosa guía-prospecto de la Casa de Atrás, también llamada Institución para la Permanencia Temporal de Judíos y Similares (*Viajar*, 1995: 63).

Amat’s interest in writing from that metaphorical space gains more relevance as her fiction becomes more metaliterary. Metaliterature reveals itself as self-contained and infinite, like Borges’s *aleph*. Amat is interested in writers who write from that space of “la Casa de Atrás”. Nena Rocamora in *El país del alma* and Nuria in *La intimidación*

dwell there. This is not only a literary space but also a literary destiny. It is symbolically situated behind the moving shelves of a canonical library. There are not only Jews inhabiting it, as was the case of Anna Frank and her family; it is also the home of other types of writers living in exile, writers who have opted for the margins and, of course, it is also the home of many female writers. The attics are “Casas de Atrás” and so are closets; spaces that are metaphors of knowledge for contemporary critics such as Butler, Kosofsky, Bell Hooks, Gilbert and Gubar, among others. It is important to bear in mind that one can only reside temporarily in the “Casa de Atrás”. The literary-subject cannot be there permanently. It precedes death, normally caused by suicide, it also precedes madness and, most importantly, it precedes the advent of the text. In this way, the “Casa de Atrás”, as the notion of author for Barthes and Foucault, lacks continuity. The inner exile to which Amat repeatedly refers is then related to life and the failure to live a literary life outside the space of the mind and of the text. It is also related to language and its structure, to the limits of literary creation along with the place the “I” occupies within the space enclosed by these limits, the space where the female “I” reaches a momentary unity, subjectivity, and keeps it in a state of balance defying and playing with all the elements that can sustain it: gender expectations, generic expectations, the social, the literary, the intertextual and the self-reflexive.

It can be affirmed that the difference between the narrators or protagonists of the three novels written before the “libros sin voz” and the protagonists of Amat’s recent publications is solely literary quality but it would be much more accurate to

leave this difference as one of representational density. Amat started her literary *bildungsroman*, her own “viaje” towards the “estado de novela” precisely in the narrative genre. She started it with a female “I” that would never turn her readings into part of the text she creates. Maite never fictionalises literature although she finishes her text with the desire to do so. This clearly clashes with the wish expressed by Nuria in *La intimidad*. As expressed in the quotation that opened this conclusion, she wanted to be the last novelist. Maite wanted to write her first metaliterary text, Nuria wanted to write the last. Has *El país del alma* been the last? The answer is “no”, although that desire can be taken as the ultimate fantasy of an author who sees the novel as “[...] una pasión secreta que tienes durante dos o tres años y que nadie conoce. Puedo vivir de ella dos o tres años. Por eso me gusta y por eso me cuesta acabarlas” (Barcelona, 18/6/1999). If “locura” is suffered by whoever has an “escritura” but not an “obra”, the author will need to participate in a certain “locura metaliteraria” in order to keep the “escritura” going. If her “obra” was completed, her literary-subjectivity would be consolidated. Being a writer would not be restricted to acts of becoming or being momentarily. That would be an act of dying, that is where the Barthesian death of the author dies, that is when the author finishes: when there is no possibility to write anymore. Only death can finish the process of literary *bildung*. Amat’s literary *bildungsroman* has not finished even though she has returned to the “estado de novela” from which she departed. Maybe that is precisely the reason why her *bildung* has not finished. Maybe to finish it, she would need to die and die sane like Don Quijote. His death symbolised the end of dreams, fiction and literature. This

opposes the metaliterary quest Amat puts forward in her essay “Biblioteca interior” where she defines again the metaliterary dimension of her writing, self-reflexive and intertextual at the same time:

Decir biblioteca interior cuando me refiero al fondo o dobladillo de mi escritura es dar como sabido y comprendido que todo cuanto puedo escribir, gracias a ese rincón de silencios y palabras enmudecidas, otros libros se ocuparon de decirlo antes. Mi biblioteca interior tiene una función de tamiz, ese sí personal, de lo ya dicho. Como si la biblioteca fuera espejo de otro espacio interior, un espejo grande cuya imagen refleja al triste payaso de la inventiva, aquella vieja desdentada de erudición libresca que se ríe sola de mis erudiciones librescas.

Mi biblioteca interior es una inseguridad segura, un vacío lleno, una blanda fortaleza. Allí es donde preparo cada día el germen de la escritura. Allí me hago la loca. O soy realmente loca. Allí es donde la voz me habla. Esa voz sorda e implacable que nunca ha dejado de hablarme y yo de responderle, como si estuviera loca (*Letra*, 1998: 176).

“La voz”, a character in its own right in *La intimidad*, speaks solely to the narrator. Nuria is there her only addressee. However, in *El país del alma*, the omniscient voice—a sad instance indeed of this “triste payaso de la inventiva”, for what “la voz” wants in *La intimidad* is to create alternative narratives to the narrator’s vision of the world—does not speak to the main narrative voices. It speaks to us. It does not even speak to Baltus. If this omniscient voice is read as the voice of the dead Nena coming back to the text, haunting it, and trying to understand as narrator what she could not understand as character, then, the closing lines of *El país del alma* consolidate the value of metaliterary discourse in Amat and also the importance of the challenge posed to expectations of gender and genre:

Cuando yo deje de ser, la mitad de vuestra memoria dejará de ser, dijo ella.
Y si yo dejara de ser, todo el recuerdo dejaría de ser, pensó él.

Ella y él eran palabras desencajadas. Chocaban entre sí para inventar algo que decir con ellas. Se resistían a vivir y a morir separadas.

Sí. Entre la pena y la nada, elegimos la pena, dijeron las palabras (*País*, 1999: 375-376).

Both *La intimidación* and *El país del alma* invite a reading that blends and challenges gender and generic expectations and assumptions. This reading is sustained by the metaliterary discourse Amat has cultivated in previous texts. The end of *El país del alma* illustrates the view that such a reading can only be metaliterary. Such a reading constantly challenges literature, as I have aimed to prove. Words choose sadness because the other choice means effectively nothing. That sadness evokes the melancholic tone Amat has imbued in the characterisation of the father and of Nuria in *La intimidación*, of Nena Rocamora and Baltus Arnau in *El país del alma*. By putting these two novels in relation to the literature she has written before, it has been possible to ascertain how far this distinctively gendered and generic sadness can take us, how many (meta)literary associations it provokes in respect to Amat's earlier texts and in respect to the reader's own literary awareness. The end of *El país del alma* invites reflection on literature or, rather, memory and literary thought and consequently, also on the generic identity of the text and of the gender identity of the character.

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